

Highnam Parish Council

Community Engagement Strategy

Preamble:

Community cohesion, pride of place, and locality identity are precious commodities. They cannot be taken for granted and require regular nurturing. Highnam is a relatively large village: it is made up of a broad range of age groups, differing interests, and potentially competing aspirations. How to harness these energies is a challenge, but essential to ensuring Highnam remains an attractive and valued place where all residents can live, work, and play.

The Parish Council (the Council) represents the first tier of local government. As such, it is closest to its residents: it should represent their interests, lobby on their behalf where necessary, and remain accountable for its actions. It should be accessible; relevant; alert to emerging issues and demographic trends. The Council should be a dynamic organisation which leads, influences, coordinates, and represents its community. It should also have the facility to be able to gain an awareness of emerging issues by close collaborative working with local organisations.

This Paper explores ways in which these aspirations might be best achieved.

Community Contacts:

The Council interacts with a range of contacts, as summarised below:

- *Individual residents.*
- *Village based representative bodies:* e.g. Staunton's Hill Management Committee; Lassington Reach Management Committee; Highnam Good Neighbour Initiative; Neighbourhood Watch; Highnam Community Centre Trust; Parochial Church Council; William Andrews Foundation etc.
- *External Representative Bodies:* Central Govt; Gloucestershire County Council; Police; Tewkesbury BC; MPs; adjoining Parish Councils.
- *Service providers:* e.g. Primary School; Doctors' Surgery; Nursery; Bus Company.
- *Village Clubs and Societies:* e.g. Chestnut Club; Uniform Groups; Highnam Heritage; Highnam Players; FC Highnam; Highnam Court Cricket Club; Highnam Quilters; Environmental Working Group; Allotment Society; Highnam Walkers; Wild Highnam; Playgroup; Community Café; Pop Up Pub etc.
- *Commercial Organisations:* e.g. Highnam Post Office and Stores; Rodway Hill Golf Club; Canal Trust; Toby Carvery; Highnam Business Centre; Over Farm Shop etc.
- *Major Landowners:* i.e. Farmers; RSPB (Highnam Woods); Highnam Court, Fenton Estate etc.

Aims:

The aim of this strategy is to improve the way the Council informs and consults with its residents and partners on important issues by:

- Sharing information.
- Collecting views and listening to them.
- Being inclusive and engaging with all residents and partners.

Objectives:

The specific objectives of the strategy are to:

- Improve, plan and shape the future of the parish according to local needs and priorities.
- Use engagement to inform decision making, ensuring decisions meet the needs of the parish.
- Be a stronger more active cohesive community.

Engagement Methodology:

The Council will liaise, work and communicate with each of the above contacts in differing ways and at different times, i.e. there is no one size fits all approach. It may be necessary to establish a range of differing engagement channels to ensure consultation includes all members of the parish including hard to reach groups. The following though proposes a generic approach to each contact category:

- *Residents* – The Council will encourage attendance at Council meetings; expeditiously publish meeting agendas, reports and minutes; fully exploit the potential of social media platforms by promoting use of its website and encouraging readership of Facebook postings; publish monthly articles in the Village Link; publish half yearly reflective Newsletters; utilise Noticeboards to post messages and provide timely information on key issues.
- *Representative Bodies*- The Council needs to do more to proactively engage with these organisations. They represent the lifeblood of the community. They should be encouraged to provide periodic Briefing Notes on recent activities for the Council’s consideration, and invited to attend Council meetings as appropriate to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. The Council should offer to send representatives to attend meetings of these bodies as necessary.
- *External Representative Bodies* – Borough and County Councillors regularly attend Council meetings. These provide a vital conduit of information and opinion which should flow in both directions in a timely fashion. The Council should even more effectively lobby these bodies through these key contacts and exploit opportunities to raise issues of concern.
- *Service Providers*: In the past the Council had a representative councillor on the Primary School Governing Body. Consideration should be given to requesting a seat on this again, and, perhaps, also seeking representation on the Doctors’ Surgery Patients Forum or similar.

- *Village Clubs and Societies*: The Council should actively seek opportunities to either meet with these bodies on a regular, say annual, basis or establish effective lines of communication with them.
- *Commercial Organisations and Landowners*: Similar to Clubs and Societies, the Council should establish contact with each of these businesses, seeking opportunities for regular dialogue on matters of mutual interest, whilst recognising the need to maintain commercial confidentialities and special interest proprietaries.

Summary:

Any community is the sum of its parts. The Council should be the glue that binds these disparate parts together. It should not operate in a vacuum, but be sufficiently attuned to the pulse of the community, ensuring its work programme, business plan and core values reflects its needs. This strategy is designed to provide the tools and mechanisms to achieve this. It is though more an attitude of mind, not a prescriptive approach, capable of continual refinement and adaptation. Throughout proportionality should prevail: it's more about consolidating and reinforcing what we already do but could, perhaps, do better.

Charlie Coats: Chair Highnam Parish Council