

Somersham Parish Council

Community Engagement Policy and Action Plan

Document Control

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Responsible Officer	Executive Officer

1. Introduction

Somersham Parish Council is committed to engaging openly, honestly and effectively with residents, businesses, local organisations and other stakeholders. The Council recognises that involving the community in decisions affecting the parish leads to better governance, stronger community relationships and more informed decision-making.

Community engagement is fundamental to local democracy. It enables the Council to understand local priorities, gather evidence, and ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the parish while remaining transparent and accountable.

The Council is currently preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for Somersham. This is one of the most significant community-led projects undertaken by the Parish Council and will involve extensive consultation with residents, businesses, landowners, statutory bodies and community groups. Engagement undertaken as part of the Neighbourhood Plan will follow the principles set out within this policy and will meet all statutory consultation requirements.

2. Purpose

This policy establishes the principles and approach that Somersham Parish Council will follow when engaging with the community.

Its objectives are to:

- encourage meaningful participation in local decision-making;

- improve transparency and accountability;
 - ensure decisions are informed by community views and local evidence;
 - support inclusive and accessible engagement;
 - strengthen relationships between the Council and the community;
 - provide a consistent framework for all engagement activities.
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3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Parish Councillors;
- the Executive Officer and Council staff;
- Council committees and working groups;
- advisory groups and steering groups;
- contractors or consultants undertaking engagement on behalf of the Council.

The policy applies to all engagement activities, including:

- public consultations;
 - surveys and questionnaires;
 - public meetings;
 - workshops;
 - exhibitions;
 - neighbourhood planning;
 - community projects;
 - strategic planning;
 - service reviews;
 - policy development.
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4. Our Principles

Somersham Parish Council will ensure that engagement is:

- **Open** – providing timely, clear and accurate information.
- **Inclusive** – encouraging participation from all sections of the community.

- **Accessible** – using a variety of methods suitable for different audiences.
 - **Transparent** – clearly explaining how decisions are made.
 - **Proportionate** – matching the level of engagement to the importance of the issue.
 - **Respectful** – recognising differing opinions and encouraging constructive dialogue.
 - **Responsive** – providing feedback wherever possible.
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5. Community Engagement Commitments

The Council will:

- explain clearly the issue or proposal being considered;
- identify how the community can influence decisions;
- seek to engage those most affected;
- use a range of communication methods;
- remove barriers to participation wherever practical;
- consider all representations fairly;
- explain how feedback has informed decisions where appropriate;
- evaluate engagement activities to improve future practice.

Community engagement informs Council decisions but will be considered alongside:

- statutory obligations;
 - financial implications;
 - environmental impacts;
 - technical advice;
 - available resources;
 - wider strategic priorities.
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6. Current Priority – Neighbourhood Plan

During the life of this policy, the Council's principal community engagement project is the preparation of the **Somersham Neighbourhood Plan**.

The Neighbourhood Plan provides residents with an opportunity to help shape the future development of the parish by influencing planning policies that will guide development over the coming years.

The Council is committed to ensuring that the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan is:

- community-led;
- evidence-based;
- inclusive;
- transparent;
- compliant with all statutory consultation requirements.

Engagement activities may include:

- public consultation events;
- village workshops;
- online questionnaires;
- exhibitions;
- meetings with local organisations;
- engagement with young people;
- stakeholder meetings with local businesses and landowners;
- statutory Regulation 14 and Regulation 16 consultations.

The Council recognises that successful community participation is essential to producing a Neighbourhood Plan that genuinely reflects the aspirations of the parish.

7. Methods of Engagement

Depending upon the project, the Council may use:

- Parish Council website;
- social media platforms;
- parish newsletters;
- noticeboards;
- public meetings;
- drop-in events;

- workshops;
- surveys;
- online consultation platforms;
- focus groups;
- stakeholder meetings;
- exhibitions;
- email updates.

The Council will use a combination of methods wherever possible to maximise participation.

8. Levels of Community Engagement

The Council follows nationally recognised good practice.

Level	Purpose	Our Commitment
Inform	Provide information.	We will keep residents informed.
Consult	Seek views before making decisions.	We will listen carefully and explain how views have influenced decisions where appropriate.
Involve	Work directly with the community.	We will ensure local concerns are considered throughout the process.
Collaborate	Develop solutions together.	We will work in partnership with residents and stakeholders wherever appropriate.
Empower	Delegate decision-making where lawful.	We will implement decisions where authority has been delegated to the community.

9. Statutory Consultation

The Council will comply with all statutory consultation requirements, including those arising from planning legislation and neighbourhood planning regulations.

Where appropriate, the Council may undertake engagement beyond the statutory minimum to ensure decisions are informed by local knowledge and community aspirations.

10. Equality and Accessibility

The Council is committed to ensuring that engagement opportunities are fair, inclusive and accessible.

Where reasonably practicable the Council will:

- provide information in accessible formats;
 - use plain English;
 - offer both online and face-to-face opportunities;
 - consider the needs of people with disabilities;
 - encourage participation from under-represented groups.
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11. Roles and Responsibilities

The Parish Council

The Council is responsible for:

- approving this policy;
- ensuring adequate resources are available;
- considering consultation outcomes;
- reviewing the effectiveness of engagement.

Councillors

Councillors will:

- promote community participation;
- encourage open dialogue;
- consider community feedback objectively.

Executive Officer

The Executive Officer will:

- coordinate engagement activities;
 - maintain consultation records;
 - ensure compliance with relevant legislation;
 - publish consultation outcomes where appropriate.
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12. Monitoring

The Council will review community engagement activities by considering:

- participation levels;
- diversity of respondents;
- effectiveness of communication methods;
- lessons learned;
- achievement of project objectives.

Findings will be used to improve future engagement.

13. Community Engagement Action Plan

Action	Lead	Timescale
Maintain and update the Council website	Executive Officer	Ongoing
Publish regular newsletters	Council	Throughout the year
Maintain active social media channels	Executive Officer	Ongoing
Promote attendance at Council meetings	Council	Ongoing
Deliver engagement programme for the Neighbourhood Plan	Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group / Council	2026/7– Completion
Undertake surveys and consultations on major Council projects	Council	As required
Publish consultation feedback summaries	Executive Officer	Following consultations
Review communication methods annually	Council	July each year
Seek grant funding for major engagement projects where appropriate	Council	As required

14. Budget

The Council will make provision within its annual budget to support community engagement activities.

Routine engagement will continue through:

- the Parish Council website;
- social media;
- newsletters;
- public meetings;
- community noticeboards.

For significant projects, including the Neighbourhood Plan, the Council will seek external grant funding where available to support consultation and engagement activities.

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains current, effective and compliant with legislation and best practice.

The Council will continue to develop new ways of engaging with residents and stakeholders to ensure that local decision-making remains open, transparent and representative of the community it serves.