



Coxhoe Parish Council

**Draft Communications and Community Engagement
Strategy**

October 2010



Communication and Community Engagement Strategy

Foreword

As we are about to commence work on our second Parish Plan it is important that we reflect on what we have in place to involve and engage with our local communities.

Good communications and community involvement is critical to earning and maintaining the respect and good will of the community we serve. Community engagement is a significant factor in building local trust, improving the level of satisfaction of local residents and of providing our Council with a greater understanding of the needs and views of the local community. Good community engagement also builds trust with our partners and can lead to better co-operative working.

Coxhoe Parish Council is committed to high standards of communication. We have been significantly improving the way we communicate with our communities and we shall continue to do so.

Community engagement is about giving local people a voice and involving them in the decisions that affect them and their community. It is about the development of relationships and clear communication to deliver better services and projects. The aim of our Communications and Community Engagement Strategy is to engage residents and encourage their participation in decision making to secure better services and to create a more active and informed community.

This document sets out our commitment to high quality communications and community engagement. It sets out how Coxhoe Parish Council will engage its community across our activities.



Paul Dodsworth, Chair, Coxhoe Parish Council

Introduction

Mission, Values and Priorities – Statement of Community Engagement

We feel that we are a very ambitious and aspirational Council. By working in partnership with people who are committed to our villages, we have achieved a massive amount in the last 10 years. We want to do even more in the next ten. Our mission is to deliver quality services to Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill. We are committed to:

- listening to and responding to the views and needs of local residents and addressing their priorities;
- promoting local democracy;
- proactively working to improve our villages and the well-being of our residents;
- working in true partnership to maximise achievement and efficiency in service delivery;
- delivering and improving upon value for money; and
- continuous improvement in service delivery.

Coxhoe Parish Council's priorities are those of the communities and are found in the Parish Plan. These priorities were developed as a result of full and effective engagement with our communities. We believe that if we continue to address the priorities that are set by our communities we will continue to achieve our Council's mission and values.

Coxhoe Parish Council provides local leadership and administers a number of services. These roles can only be pursued effectively if the Council communicates with and engages with the Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill communities, through providing information and encouraging and seeking residents' views. We are therefore fully committed to communicating clearly with our residents, community groups, businesses and partners and engaging them effectively in our work and the decisions we make.

Communication and Engagement Groups

The key individuals, groups and organisations that we intend to improve communication and engagement with include:

- residents of Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill;
- users of our Parish Council services;
- Coxhoe Community Partnership and Quarrington Hill Village Partnership;
- Coxhoe Village Hall Association and Quarrington Hill Community Centre Association;
- the Head Teacher and Governors of the Primary Schools;
- young people who live and/or go to school in Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill;
- retail and other businesses in the community;

- interest groups, clubs and societies;
- Voluntary and support organisations;
- Groups of people defined by a common factor such as age, disability, faith, and other groups;
- The East Durham Rural Corridor Action Area Partnership;
- Members and staff of Durham County Council;
- Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Volunteers.

Current communication and engagement methods

The Council already shows good practice in how we go about communicating and engaging with people. We have ensured that:

- contact details for the Council, individual Councillors, the Council office are made available in the quarterly newsletters, on the Notice Boards in the villages and on the Council's newly revised and improved website;
- we have an answerphone service and website available 24/7;
- while a small Council with a single part time paid employee we are open to visiting members of the public two mornings a week;
- the quarterly newsletters provide details about the opening times of the Council Office and details of Councillors;
- notices of meetings, and key council communications, are posted on each of the Council's notice board and on our website;
- the Police and Durham County Council Councillors attend most monthly Council meetings;
- the notices we provide positively remind members of the community of their entitlement to attend meetings and talk to the Council;
- we have a website which allows easy access to partners services including electronic access to copies of planning applications determined by Durham County Council;
- we publish an Annual Report, a summary of which is distributed to every household and business in our villages;
- we have significantly developed our website into a community site which now provides details of Council services and activities and gives access to a range of documents as well as links to partner sites and information about our villages;
- we are transparent in the information we provide including our financial health and audit reports;
- we have encouraged local businesses to join our business directory on our website;
- we have developed a facebook page to try and communicate better with and engage young people and we have specific website pages devoted to young people;
- pages on our website are dedicated to encouraging local democracy and getting people involved in what is happening and can happen in our villages;
- our website aims to draw our communities' attention to important public meetings that affect them, whether or not they are Parish Council sponsored, and encourage their participation;

- we provide grants to groups and organisations only where there is perceived direct benefit to our communities;
- we have signed the Local Charter with Durham County Council in order that we might improve communication of what each other does and improve the efficiency of service delivery;
- when we developed our communities' first Parish Plan in 2004 we did so with the full engagement of our communities which in effect set the priorities of the Council;
- our website includes a facility and 'blog' to communicate current engagement activity and seek feedback and views from our community; and
- the Council has two way communications with local voluntary organisations, including Coxhoe Community Partnership and Quarrington Hill Village Partnership, and councillors are members of such organisations in their own right.

Coxhoe Parish Council has now commenced work on its second Parish Plan for the year's 2011 to 2016. We are committed to fully engaging our communities in this process. It is therefore an opportune moment to determine our future communications and community engagement strategy. The Council has therefore formulated a simple strategy of communication and engagement which builds on and extends the methods of engagement listed above and to make clear our commitment to working with and through the community.

Aims & Objectives

Our aims and objectives for communications and community engagement are:

- To work closely with residents, businesses and community groups; engage with as many people as possible who want to participate in decision-making, monitoring services and planning for the future;
- To ensure that, by getting closer to the community and being accessible to all groups, local democracy is enhanced;
- To ensure that through the use of a wide range of approaches to public involvement and community engagement, we actively encourage the involvement of residents, to capture their views and learn their concerns and effectively use those views as an integral part of the decision-making process;
- To ensure that residents have the opportunities to be heard at every stage, and the capacity to be effective citizens;
- To enable an involved, empowered and active citizenship through engagement with residents on local issues, reaching out to otherwise excluded groups, and in particular seeking the views of young people;
- To communicate information to our community clearly, timely, factually and appropriately;

- To improve our communications with our partners;
- To be actively involved in various networking organisations and partnerships;
- To raise the image and reputation of the Council;
- To enable every Councillor to maximise their role as elected representatives and community leaders;
- To ensure that our Parish Clerk has access to the right resources and is effectively trained to meet the needs of the Parish Council and ultimately those of our communities; and
- To ensure that we seek appropriate advice and assistance to enable us to secure the engagement of our communities, particularly in the development and implementation of our Parish Plan 2 (2011 -2016)

To achieve these aims and objectives we have developed an action plan. We will secure its implementation.

The Council will review the strategy from time to time to gauge whether residents have been encouraged to:

- participate in decision making to secure better services;
- help the Council to better serve the community; and
- create a more active and informed community.



Coxhoe Parish Council Communications and Engagement Action Plan

Activity	By when	By whom	Priority/Aim
To work closely with residents, businesses and community groups, engage with as many people as possible who want to participate in decision-making, monitoring services and planning for the future			
Engage all groups in Parish Plan 2 and help set the Parish Councils' priorities for the next 5 years	September 2011	Parish Clerk/Parish Plan Project Manager	Short-Medium Term
Explore ways with the community during the process about how they would best like to be engaged in future	Ongoing	Parish Clerk/Parish Plan Project Manager	Long term
Maintain community engagement and blog pages on website – positively seek engagement	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short – long term
Ensure an up to date and regularly updated website communicating accurate and timely information	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term
To ensure that, by getting closer to the community and being accessible to all groups, local democracy is enhanced			
Maintain positive engagement and support to Community and Village Partnerships	Ongoing	Chair/Vice-Chair/Nominated Members	Short-long term
Maintain positive democracy pages on web site including local partnership pages	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term
Consider engaging with the local school to build awareness raising	December 2011	Parish Clerk/ Chair/Vice- Chair	Medium term
Continue to promote public meetings and events through the website	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term
Continue to ensure that Agendas and Minutes of Meetings are placed on notice boards and on the website as soon as publicly available	Ongoing	Parish Clerk/Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term

Activity	By when	By whom	Priority/Aim
To ensure that through the use of a wide range of approaches to public involvement and community engagement, we actively encourage the involvement of residents, to capture their views and learn their concerns and effectively use those views as an integral part of the decision-making process			
Maintain and enhance Partnership quarterly newsletters	December 2010 then ongoing	Parish Clerk/Chair/Vice-Chair	Short-long term
Maintain and enhance website and promote its active use by the community	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term
Maintain and enhance facebook pages with the particular target of young people	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term
Secure advice from DRCC about developments in communications and engagement and consider implementation	December 2012	Parish Clerk/Chair/Vice-Chair	Medium term
To ensure that residents have the opportunities to be heard at every stage, and the capacity to be effective citizens			
Maintain and enhance ability of residents to have their say at Council meetings	Ongoing	Parish Clerk Chair/Vice- Chair	Short term
Maintain and enhance opportunities for residents to have their views made known through website	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk/Chair/Vice-Chair	Short term
Explore new opportunities to help views being made to the Parish Council	December 2012	Parish Clerk/Asst Parish Clerk	Medium-long term
To enable an involved, empowered and active citizenship through engagement with residents on local issues, reaching out to otherwise excluded groups, and in particular seeking the views of young people			
Explore with DRCC and DCC the real excluded groups in the villages	December 2012	Parish Clerk/Asst Parish Clerk	Medium-long term
Develop and implement action plan for further engagement	December 2012	Parish Clerk/Asst Parish Clerk	Medium-long term
Consider ways in which to engage the elderly in the villages	December 2012	Parish Clerk/Asst Parish Clerk	Medium-long term
To communicate information to our community clearly, timely, factually and appropriately			
Ensure an up to date and regularly updated website communicating accurate and timely information	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term

Activity	By when	By whom	Priority/Aim
Work with DCC press office to promote the work of the Parish Council and its partners	Ongoing	Parish Clerk/ Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term
To improve our communications with our partners			
Build on current website to share and communicate information between partners	Ongoing	Asst Parish Clerk	Short-long term
Continue to participate in Local Charter and review process with DCC	Ongoing	Parish Clerk/Chair/Vice - Chair/Nominated Members	Short-long term
Encourage partners to use local newsletters and websites	Ongoing	Parish Clerk/Chair/Vice-Chair/Nominated Members	Short-long term
To be actively involved in various networking organisations and partnerships			
Maintain profile in East Durham Rural Corridor AAP	Ongoing	All Members	Short – Medium term
Positively support local Partnerships during Parish Plan 2 process	Ongoing	Chair/Vice-Chair/Nominated Members	Short – Medium term
Influence and sustain improved partnership involvement	Ongoing	Chair/Vice-Chair/Nominated Members	Long term
To raise the image and reputation of the Council			
Secure all processes that need to be in place to achieve Quality Status	Ongoing	Parish Clerk/Asst Parish Clerk	Short term
Secure Quality Status	December 2013	Whole Council	Medium term
Celebrate the successes of the villages, its people and groups through website and quarterly newsletters	Ongoing	Whole Council	Short-long term
Use community leadership role to promote Parish Council aims and ethos at every opportunity	Ongoing	Whole Council	Short-long term
To enable every Councillor to maximise their role as elected representatives and community leaders			
Encourage Members to take active roles in their community and feedback views to the Parish Council	Ongoing	Chair/Vice - Chair/Nominated Members	Short-long term

Activity	By when	By whom	Priority/Aim
Encourage Positive engagement of Members in Community Associations, Partnerships and other community Groups	Ongoing	Chair/Vice-Chair/Nominated Members	Short-long term
To ensure that our Parish Clerk has access to the right resources and is effectively trained to meet the needs of the Parish Council and ultimately those of our communities			
To continue to review the current resources of the Parish Clerk to free up time to improve communications and engagement	December 2010	Whole Council	Short-long term
Ensure effective training is provided for CILCA and provide sufficient time to Clerk to achieve qualification	December 2010	Whole Council	Short-long term
Implement formal Parish Clerk Appraisal	December 2011	Parish Clerk/Chair	Medium term
To ensure that we seek appropriate advice and assistance to enable us to secure the engagement of our communities, particularly in the development and implementation of our Parish Plan 2 (2011 -2016)			
Engage DRCC in Plan Preparation Stage	December 2010	Whole Council	Short term
Engage DCC in plan preparation stage	December 2010	Whole Council	Short term
Secure ownership of development of Parish Plan 2 by Village Partnerships and other partners	December 2010	Chair/Vice Chair/Nominated Members	Short-medium term
Secure ownership of implementation of Parish Plan 2 by Village Partnerships and other partners	December 2011	Chair/Vice Chair/Nominated Members	Short- long term