

Great Witchingham and Lenwade

PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

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

The Council has a website, gwpc.org.uk, Cllr Rowan Banks and the Clerk have administration access to the Great Witchingham website. Councillors Peta Banks, Tracey Buckenham and the Clerk have access to the Facebook page.

The 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.

The Facebook page is available to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the Parish and promote our community positively.

Communications from the 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;
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- not contain any personal information;
- if it is official 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 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 Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

The site is not monitored 24 hours a day and the Council 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.

Sending a message or posting via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Council's Clerk via email; clerk@gwpc.org.uk and/or members of the council by sending an email or letter.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- 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;

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available. Any information posted on social media not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked. The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law, the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the 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

The Clerk to the Parish Council has a specific council email address – clerk@gwpc.org.uk. The Clerk is employed part-time, and the email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, the Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon possible. An 'out of office' message is used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, and, if appropriate, copy in the Clerk. Any emails 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 Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers. Specifically no member or officer may forward any emails you have received to anyone outside the Council that includes any outside individual's, organisation's or officer's names, emails or contact details.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council.

The 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 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 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 into 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.

This policy was adopted at a meeting on 27th July 2023 and will be reviewed in two years or sooner should legislation dictate.