

Great Finborough Parish Council

Social Media Policy

INTRODUCTION:

This policy is in place to minimise the risks and to confirm the Parish Council's use of social media.

This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, X, WhatsApp, Google+, Wikipedia, Whisper, Instagram, Vine, Tumblr and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs. It applies to use of social media for business purposes as well as personal use that may affect Council business in any way.

SOCIAL MEDIA OPERATED BY THE PARISH COUNCIL:

To ensure that all discussions on pages set up by the Council are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the guidelines listed below should be followed:

- Be considerate and respectful of others.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive
- Share freely and be generous, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members, will not be permitted. Opinions of the Council, not personal.

Communications from the Parish Council on official council business will:

- 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, other than necessary basic contact details;
- be moderated by either the Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council.
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Communications to the Parish Council are expected to:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which the enquirer does not own the copyright;
- not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.

WHY THE PARISH COUNCIL MIGHT USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PARISH BUSINESS

The Council might use social media for issues requiring community engagement, news and service updates, emergency communication, consultation and messages between members.

In relation to messages between members on parish business platforms that are officially operating is WhatsApp. Other areas that the Council may use is the Village Facebook page.

WhatsApp will be used for Council business discussions, but not used for any decision making, how records are kept, how decisions are made nor for the avoidance of informal decision-making outside official meetings.

The Parish Council 'chat' will be kept in case of text needing to be retrieved.

No sub-committees or other groups should be created on WhatsApp.

ACCOUNT OWNERSHIP

The Parish Council owns the WhatsApp group, Village Facebook Page and Village Website.

PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

Councillors and the Clerk should be aware that their personal digital activity could have an adverse impact on their professional role or the Council's image and reputation and should be aware that whilst they might not expressly name the Council on social media, this policy will still apply if a connection with the Council or their employment can be reasonably made.

As with business use of social media, Councillors and the Clerk should not publish anything that is confidential to the Council or use social media to comment on potentially sensitive matters, including (but not restricted to):

- Information about residents of the parish/the community
- Information that is politically or commercially sensitive
- Intellectual property

At no time should Council email addresses or other official contact details be used for setting up personal social media accounts or for communicating through such media.

The Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk should be the only people authorised to post, or by prior agreement, another Councillor. The Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk should moderate comments regularly.

Political Neutrality and Council Communications

The Parish Council will remain strictly politically neutral at all times. Official Council social media channels must be used only to spread factual information relating to services, meetings, and local community business

Official channels must never be used to promote or express support for any political party, individual politician, or candidate standing for election. The Council will not share, or comment on politically controversial posts or campaigns.

PRE-ELECTION PERIOD (“PURDAH”) EXPECTATIONS

During the pre-election period (the statutory period between the publication of the Notice of Election and polling day), specific legal restrictions on publicity apply.

The Council will only publish purely factual, non-controversial service announcements. No new policies, controversial consultations, or promotional campaigns will be launched, shared, or amplified.

Candidates, including sitting Councillors running for re-election, cannot use official Council channels to campaign, and candidates' social media accounts must not be linked to the Council's profiles. Any third-party political material or imagery shared on Council pages will be swiftly removed.

SEPARATION OF COUNCIL AND PERSONAL ACTIVITY

Councillors must not utilise Council-owned equipment, official email addresses, or official social media platforms to conduct personal political activity, canvass, or promote a political party.

When posting in a personal capacity, Councillors are free to engage in political activity and endorse candidates. However, they must clearly state that their views are personal and do not represent the Council. Councillors should include a standard disclaimer in their personal bios (e.g., *"Views expressed here are my own and do not represent Great Finborough Parish Council]"*).

Councillors must be extremely cautious not to express definitive personal opinions on matters (e.g., planning applications, specific local debates) on their social media that could suggest they have a "closed mind" prior to formal Council debate, which risks breaching the Localism Act 2011 regarding bias and predetermination.

PROHIBITED USE:

Councillors and employees must avoid making any social media communications that could damage the Council’s business interests or reputation, even indirectly.

Social media should not be used to defame the Council, its Clerk or any third party; to harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate against staff or third parties; to make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate colleagues or third parties.

Comments about sensitive business-related topics, such as the Council’s performance should not be posted, nor should anything to jeopardise the Council’s trade secrets, confidential information and intellectual property.

Any contact details of business contacts made during the course of employment with the Council are its confidential information. On termination of employment, staff will be expected to provide the Clerk with a copy of all such information, delete all such information from their personal social networking accounts and destroy any further copies of such information that they may have.

Any misuse of social media should be reported to the Clerk.

SAFEGUARDING AND PROTECTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE

The Council is committed to safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults. Councillors and staff must ensure that the safety and privacy of these individuals are maintained at all times. When engaging online, you must never post photographs, full names, or identifiable details of minors or vulnerable individuals without prior, explicit written consent from a parent, legal

guardian, or Council safeguarding lead. Furthermore, Councillors must not initiate or maintain private, unmonitored digital conversations with minors or vulnerable individuals; all official Council business should remain on public channels or be directed through the Parish Clerk.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

Councillors and employees should make it clear in social media postings, or in their personal profile, that they are speaking on their own behalf. It is suggested that posts are written in the first person and that a personal e-mail address is used.

All should be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that they are personally responsible for all communications which will be published on the internet for anyone to see.

If Councillors and employees disclose their affiliation with the Council on their profile or in any social media postings, they must state that their views do not represent those of the Council (unless you have been authorised to speak on our behalf as set out in the Council's Media Policy). All should also ensure that their profile and any content they post are consistent with the professional image they wish to present to parishioners, members of the public and colleagues.

If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, you should seek advice from the Chair or Clerk of the Council.

If Councillors and employees see social media content that reflects poorly on the Parish Council, they should contact the Clerk.

BREACH OF THIS POLICY

Councillors:

All Councillors must abide by the Suffolk Local Code of Conduct, adopted in 2022. If it is felt that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct or if it is thought that a Councillor has not followed the Code of Conduct a complaint can made direct to the Monitoring Officer at Mid Suffolk District Council. The complainant will need to be clear about how they think the Councillor has not followed the Code.

The Monitoring Officer can only deal with complaints about the behaviour of a Councillor which are covered by the Council's Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct only applies to a Councillor whilst undertaking his/her functions as a Councillor. It does not apply to a Councillor acting in their personal capacity.

Staff:

Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action for members of staff up to and including dismissal. Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with the Council's investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details.

Members of staff may be required to remove any social media content that is considered to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

Signed: …….. Dated: …….