



WDPC Community Engagement & Communications Policy

West Dean Parish council aims to ensure that using a wide range of approaches to public consultation and community engagement it actively encourages residents to inform its decision-making process and make an input into decisions which affect their day to day lives in the parish.

West Dean Parish Council are committed to creating and maintaining effective working relationships with all sectors of the community. The Council recognises that there are different levels of engagement and will endeavour to involve the community in the following ways:

- Inform people about its work and the services it provides,
- Consult and seek out the views of the community,
- Encourage community participation in local government,
- Collaborate with individuals, community groups and organisations where appropriate, to achieve agreed aims for the benefit of the parish,
- Build on effective working relationships within the community and encourage a sense of ownership of assets, infrastructure, and projects.

AIMS

To establish clear, easy to use channels of communication between West Dean Parish Council and all members of the Parish of West Dean, and vice versa regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, faith, or sexual orientation. To communicate and listen to the local business community, the many clubs, organisations, and societies which are active in the parish, it's partners such as Forest of Dean District Council, the Neighbourhood Policing Team, faith groups and elected members for Gloucestershire and Forest of Dean as required. To provide information on important matters, in an appropriate manner, to facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups.

INTRODUCTION

Every Members details and a contact list will be displayed on the Parish Council notice boards around the parish and on the Parish Council website. Please bear in mind that Councillors are unpaid volunteers, with work and personal commitments beyond their role as a Parish Councillor. As such they may be unable to respond immediately.

If you wish to bring a matter or suggestion about services etc. to the Council a letter, email, or other formal communication, to the Parish Clerk will ensure that it is brought before the Parish Council and dealt with in a suitable and professional manner.

It is the Parish Council's intention to engage and consult with the community using the following methods:

PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

- West Dean Parish Council meet on the last Wednesday of each month, except for December.
- The Planning Committee will meet, at 5pm at the West Dean Centre on the first and third Tuesday of each month.
- The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council will take place in June of each year when Councillors will elect the Chair and appoint the Vice Chair for the forthcoming year.
- The Annual Parish Meeting (a meeting of the electorate) will take place in June of each year.
- The Parish Council will meet at The West Dean Centre, unless otherwise notified.
- A 30 minute 'Public Forum' period, which is reserved for parishioners, will be held at the beginning of each Parish Council Meeting. Whilst this period allows for representations to be made, and questions asked, by members of the Parish, the Council reserves the right to not engage in responding to matters raised to allow time for further research or discussion to allow for answers to be provided later to the parishioner.
- Once the 'Public Forum' period has ended, and the Council's standing orders resumed, any matters requiring action shall be dealt with. By way of a response being issued, or a resolution being made to add an item to the agenda of a future meeting for full discussion by the Council.

PRESS RELATIONS

Only the Parish Clerk (acting on the instruction of the Chair or a majority of Council members) and the Chair of the Council will issue press releases and comments to the local media. In all instances the views expressed should represent, at least, the majority view of the Council members.

Should Parish Councillors provide information to the media it needs to be made clear that they are speaking as individuals, and not on behalf of the Council. The sole exception being where they have been appointed to do so by a majority vote of the Council.

SOCIAL NETWORKING (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube)

The Parish Council has a small number of Social Media pages, for which access and the responsibility for updating shall be delegated to the website management contractor or officers of the council.

Members of staff or Parish Councillors using social networking through their personal or professional lives must not make adverse comments on the activities of the Parish Council and its members or employees, to ensure that the Code of Conduct is not breached.

Parish Councillors should also be careful not to disclose or discuss confidential information that they may have access to, because of their position within the Council. This obligation of confidentiality extends beyond a Councillor's tenure as a member of West Dean Parish Council. Any breaches of this policy will result in action being taken as per the Council's Code of Conduct Policy.

NOTICEBOARDS

The following items will be displayed permanently upon the Parish noticeboards, situated throughout the Parish:

- Details of all current Parish Councillors with contact details
- Parish Council meeting dates for the year Notice of the annual audited accounts will be displayed when appropriate. The Parish Council will strive to give five clear days' notice of Council meetings. However, the Council will, in all cases, comply with the legally required minimum of three clear days' notice in advance of any meeting.
- Notices for Parishioners will also be displayed as and when appropriate.

PARISH WEBSITE

The following items will be permanently available:

- Parish Councillors names and contact details
- Parish Council meeting dates for the year
- The approved Parish Council Minutes (uploaded within one week of approval)
- Parish Council Policies and Procedures as well as any documents relating to the governance of the Council, such as its Standing Orders etc.
- Annual and monthly financial statements for the Parish Council, and the Annual Governance Statement (AGAR).

The Parish Clerk will ensure that all Parish Council information included on the Website is regularly updated.

CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence relating to the Parish should be addressed to the Parish Clerk in the first instance. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the relevant Council Member or organisation as soon as practicably possible. If a Parishioner wishes a matter to be formally discussed, at a Parish Council meeting, the Parish Clerk must be notified at least 10 working days prior to the meeting to enable the item to be placed on the agenda.

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Annual Parish Meeting is held so that parishioners can have the opportunity to listen to the progress of the Parish Council over the past year and have the opportunity to debate local issues and celebrate local events and activities.

PARISH NEWSLETTER

The parish newsletter is produced twice yearly. It is distributed via various outlets including shops, hairdressers etc shortly after publication, copies are also available from the Parish Council offices at The West Dean Centre.

A digital copy of the current newsletter will be made available on the West Dean Parish website – www.westdeanpc.org.uk

SPECIFIC PROJECTS

From time-to-time West Dean Parish Council will undertake specific projects for the benefit of the community, the natural or built environment in response to the Climate & Biodiversity Emergencies or economic reasons. The normal method for undertaking these is via a working party set up under the Council or a standing committee. These working parties may co-opt members of the community onto a working party to ensure that the community is fully represented and involved with a specific project.

These projects may also require the use of surveys and questionnaires to gain feedback and understanding of the project from the community, wherever possible the Council will ensure that all sectors of the community are involved in such feedback mechanisms.

Wherever possible the mechanism used to gather data about a specific project i.e., survey, questionnaire etc, these will be developed in conjunction with the project team and administered by the Clerks. All such documents will be presented to Council for approval prior to distribution.

If WDPC become involved in any major projects that has a wider community focus or impact, these projects may require an element of public consultation. These community engagement events will be administered by the Clerks with approval from Council, this is to be agreed prior to any events being booked or actions taken.