

Bar Hill Parish Council Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a code of practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, Council Staff and other who engage with Bar Hill Parish Council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to)

- Parish Council website
- Parish Council emails
- Facebook, Instagram and all other social networking sites
- Twitter and other microblogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcase sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to all Parish Councillors and Bar Hill Parish Council staff and applies to others communicating with the Parish Council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written and verbal communications. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

Individual Parish Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to:

- Direct residents to agendas, minutes and dates of meeting on the Parish Council Website
- Advertise events and activities
- Share information that is relevant to the Parish
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk

Councillors using their own social media accounts or any other form of communication for community or other purposes do so as private individuals and should not use any privileged material gained from their position as a Parish Councillor.

The Parish Clerk will be responsible for establishing and administering Parish Council social media accounts. Bar Hill Parish Council Facebook page will be an information only page. Parish Council posts should only be made using the Parish Council social media account. Councillors wishing to utilise a Parish Council social media account should email the Parish Clerk with the proposed content and posting instructions as Press Officer the Clerk will post on the page if the item is relevant.

For the management of the Parish Councils own Facebook page, the Council will appoint the Clerk as the moderator of the page's output and they will be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with this Social Media Policy.

The Clerk will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from Council Social Media pages which are deemed to be a defamatory or libellous nature.

Code of Practice

When using social media, Parish Councillors, and Council staff must be mindful of the information they post on both and personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be objective, balanced and informative

Parish Councillors or Council Staff must not:

- Present personal views as that of the Council
- Express any views which may have a party-political bias
- Present themselves in a way that cause embarrassment to the Council
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council
- Engage in personal attacks. Online fights and hostile communications
- Post any information that infringes copyright of others
- Post photos of minors without parental/Carers permission
- Post any information that may be deemed libel
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images and text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or Committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at the Council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk.

Misuse of social media contact that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published email address which is used for Council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses.

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