



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

BOTUS FLEMING PARISH COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Introduction

Botus Fleming Parish Council's (BFPC) community engagement strategy brings together all engagement activities into one overarching strategy aiming to ensure better co-ordination with all communities within the geographical area of Botus Fleming parish based on our belief that:

- All people within our community should be involved in the decisions that affect them
- All people within our community deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs
- Parish council policies and strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations.

This community engagement strategy recognises the diversity of our community, the importance of community capacity building and the need to provide appropriate opportunities for local people and the community to participate at whatever level they wish to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.

Botus Fleming Parish Council's vision

This strategy supports the council's vision of Botus Fleming as:

- A parish that protects the outstandingly beautiful environment in which it is situated and supports the sustainability of our planet
- A lifestyle that benefits from improving the living standards of its people and protecting the environment
- A community that enjoys a safe, secure and healthy way of life

- A caring community that provides for all its age groups
- A community that takes every opportunity to help itself

It provides a focus for all engagement activities, policies and processes to align with the council's objectives to create an improved quality of life by working with people and partners, devolving decision-making and empowering individuals and communities to contribute and influence services.

What is the overall aim of the Community Engagement Strategy?

This Community Engagement Strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision-making and enable us to improve public services to enhance quality of life across Botus Fleming Parish. By this we mean:

- Strong communities, who can form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns
- Active communities, where people are supported to improve quality of life in their own communities
- Inclusive communities, where all sections of the community feel they have opportunities to be involved in decision-making and influence public services.

What are our objectives?

The objectives below identify how we can contribute to the BFPC's vision and ensure that the Community Engagement Strategy delivers an effective and coordinated approach to community engagement for the benefit of all people and the diverse communities of the Parish of Botus Fleming. We will:

- Strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities
- Provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities
- Manage and coordinate engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality and partner participation and avoid duplication
- Ensure that community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sections of the community, particularly people and groups that are often missed out of community engagement activities

- Listen to communities and ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement
- Provide variety and flexibility and choice in community engagement activities
- Listen and learn from our own and others' experience and share community engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision-making.

How will we achieve the objectives?

Detailed consideration will be given to all projects, proposals and policies to ensure we achieve our objectives set out above. Such decisions will be continually monitored and reviewed to ensure they are flexible and evolve to respond to the changing needs of our communities and community engagement activities.

Our priorities include:

- Improving coordination and governance of community engagement activities, by the development of protocols, toolkits and frameworks that reach out and involve the community as a whole
- The new Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) team organising a committee, The Big Event Organising Committee and the Community Action Team are all examples of informed individuals coming forward to support initiatives run by BFPC
- We will produce a newsletter on as a regular basis as resources allow, and when there are sufficient events/news items to justify the costs. It will be delivered to all addresses within the parish and lodged on the BFPC website (<https://www.botusfleming.org.uk/>)
- The BFPC Facebook group page will be maintained and used to disseminate information on the Parish Council's activities. The Facebook group is purely informative and due to resources is not designed to be an interactive group
- To continue to provide a regular surgery to make councillors more accessible and inclusive. The surgery takes place at 7pm prior to each BFPC meeting at St Mary's Church Hall, Botus Fleming
- Developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.

The minutes of each BFPC meeting and the Annual Parish Meeting are available on the BFPC website (<https://www.botusfleming.org.uk/>) and also on the notice boards in Hatt and Botus Fleming

- Improve coordination with partners in engagement activities
- Raise awareness of volunteering opportunities in the parish
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas
- Rolling out our community engagement strategy through councillors and others involved in community engagement activities.

Who is this strategy for?

We recognise that BFPC alone cannot achieve the ambitions in this strategy.

Everyone has a part to play in making this Community Engagement Strategy work, particularly:

- All residents and those who visit this area
- Elected members, who play a key role in delivering the aims in this strategy
- Parish clerk and any staff or volunteers – everyone is involved in community engagement activity in various forms
- Community and voluntary sector organisations, who provide local services, work directly with local groups and organisations and with members of usually excluded groups and represent the views of their sectors
- Partners, by working with other organisations and partnerships to make sure that services across the parish complement each other.

BFPC seeks to work with other organisations, such as the police, local authorities, health service, and all groups outside and within the parish together with individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to make sure that engagement activities influence the future direction of the Parish.

We also know that we need to work with our local communities to encourage effective community engagement and ensure that processes are flexible and can be tailored to different groups and individuals in different areas of the Parish. We understand that sometimes people are reluctant to get involved and we will

work with other partners to ensure that community engagement is as straightforward as possible and targeted appropriately.

What do we mean by community engagement?

Community engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities and different services and situations.

BFPC has designed our Community Engagement Strategy to ensure that we can provide the most appropriate means for people and communities to be involved and give feedback.

The various means of community engagement are:

- Information supports all types of community engagement and keeps people informed about decisions, services and local events. Information is available from the Botus Fleming Parish Council website (<https://www.botusfleming.org.uk/>), Facebook page, parish notice boards and the annual Parish Council report and newsletter.
- Consultation can be used when there is a decision to make about something or when there are a number of choices about the details (e.g. purchase of the recreation field) by such means as online polls, questionnaires, newsletter feedback and open day meetings. Attending meetings - Parishioners are welcomed and encouraged to attend any parish council meeting, to put forward their concerns, suggestions or offer assistance within the 'Public Participation' section at the beginning of each meeting. Parishioners are also welcomed and encouraged to attend and take part in the Annual Parish Meeting. Parishioners can also put forward ideas and/or concerns at the monthly surgery.
- Comment - Every resident, visitor or partner is welcome to put forward their thoughts, ideas, concerns, criticisms or worries by telephone, email, or letter through the Parish Clerk. All the necessary contact details are on the Parish Council's website <https://www.botusfleming.org.uk/> and the clerk is available Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 10.30 am.

Every type of involvement is important in the community engagement process and different methods will be used depending on the activity and circumstances.

Sometimes it may be appropriate to inform or consult on some activities, while at other times we will seek to involve communities and individuals in much greater depth.

Our aim is to work towards devolved decision-making and supporting independent community initiatives wherever possible and to demonstrate where

this type of community engagement activity can make genuine improvements to services.

What are our community engagement standards?

In all of our engagement activities we will:

Co-ordination & Partnership

- Coordinate community engagement activities, with the parish council and partners, to avoid duplication and 'consultation fatigue', caused by too much consultation and too little action and feedback
- Provide leadership, to ensure that community engagement influences services and plans

Access & Inclusion

- Ensure that we take into account particular needs and overcome any difficulties participants may have to enable them to participate
- Involve communities that are usually excluded
- Ensure that there is equal access to services, and that services meet the needs of all communities
- Ensure adherence to health and safety regulations

Clarity of Purpose

- Be open and honest about the aims of community engagement activity and what it hopes to achieve
- Ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unnecessarily
- Have clear processes to feed back on community engagement activity and outcomes and give reasons if unable to deliver on expectations
- Ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and how the information will be used

Confidentiality

- Ensure awareness of confidentiality issues in community engagement activities, with particular regard to the Freedom of Information Act (Confidentiality issues will be adhered to, within the constraints of legislation)

Integrity

- Ensure that community engagement activities are voluntary, and that participants can withdraw at any time
- Ensure that information obtained from community engagement activities is honestly interpreted
- Ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times
- Respect the rights of participants to decide how much to reveal about themselves
- Give careful consideration to activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not offend, cause distress or embarrassment

Visibility

- Ensure that those most directly affected by plans and decisions are aware of opportunities for community engagement
- Engage with key stakeholders and/or representative groups in advance of specific community engagement activities – to provide advance warning and to seek views on the most effective means of publicity

How will we know if our strategy is working?

It is important for us to know whether we are achieving our vision for this Community Engagement Strategy and we welcome any feedback and will openly and honestly consider such and feedback to any such communication.

This strategy will be reviewed annually and due consideration given to any amendments suggested or required.

Who is responsible for this Community Engagement Strategy?

This strategy supports co-ordinated community engagement and consultation activities – the key to successful implementation of the strategy is effective management and governance. The following structure provides a governance framework for this Community Engagement Strategy.

- Elected Parish Councillors will actively work to enhance community engagement activity in council decision-making.
- The Parish Clerk is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the strategy.
- Communications Officer – an elected Parish Councillor and works with the remainder of the Parish Council and the Parish Clerk to assist in the development and implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy.

Date of last review: May 2022

Date of next review: May 2023