



The Sampfords Parish Council

Community Engagement Policy

Introduction

The Sampfords Parish Council's community engagement policy brings together all engagement activities into one overarching strategy aiming to ensure better co-ordination with all communities within the geographical area of The Sampfords parishes based on our belief that:

- Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies.
- It provides opportunity for local people to talk to the council about their aspirations and or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well its performing.
- All people within The Sampfords community should be involved in the decisions that affect them.
- All people within The Sampfords 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 policy places its residents first and recognises, the importance of community involvement 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.

The Sampfords Parish Council's vision

This strategy supports the council's vision of The Sampfords as:

- A community that enjoys a safe, secure and healthy way of life.
- A caring community that provides for all its age groups.
- A lifestyle that benefits from improving the living standards of its people.
- A parish that protects the outstandingly beautiful environment in which it is situated but is brave enough to embrace the best of what the modern world has to offer.
- A community that takes every opportunity to help itself.

What is the overall aim of the Community Engagement Strategy?

The purpose of the strategy is to support the delivery of the council's "consultation" objectives. These objectives will enable it to engage more effectively with its community, helping residents and stakeholders to become more involved in shaping the services it provides and leading their



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communities. It sets out how the council will ensure the principles of good consultation are applied in future.

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 services to enhance quality of life across The Sampfords.

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 of effective consultation and engagement are to ensure that the council:

- stimulates closer dialogue with our community.
- sets out actions the council will carry out to better co-ordinate and more effectively engage the community.
- ensures that consultation is inclusive and representative.
- meets our duty to be inclusive and accessible.
- encourages increased cross-service co-ordination.
- promotes better use of financial resources.

These objectives are important as they aim to:

- strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities.
- improve the council's communication with its residents and develop a greater understanding of parishioners' needs and wishes.
- be committed to involving an ever-increasing diverse population because we want to make sure that needs of all groups are considered when delivering services.
- provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities.
- ensure that any consultation we do is clear, consistent, co-ordinated and of a high quality all across the council.
- ensure there is full knowledge of past, present and future consultations and results where available.



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- 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
- provide variety and flexibility and choice in community engagement activities
- ensure that consultation within the council has real outcomes.
- work together to provide better services to residents and value for money.
- listen to communities and ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement.
- 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.
- maintain a website and social media pages to engage consultation with the local community and wider interest community.
- to provide a regular “surgery” to make councillors more accessible and inclusive.
- developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- improve coordination with partners in engagement activities.
- raise awareness of volunteering opportunities in the parish.
- developing and enhancing skills and expertise in engagement and participation.
- 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 the council alone cannot achieve the ambitions in this strategy. Everyone has a part to play in making this Community Engagement Strategy work, particularly:

- all Sampfords residents.
- elected members, who play a key role in delivering the aims in this strategy.



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- parish clerk and 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.

The Sampfords Parish Council 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 has been achieved so far?

Parish Councillor Training.

- We ensure that all Councillors attend a training session to improve their knowledge of Council business.

Clerk & RFO Training.

- We ensure that the Clerk / RFO attends various training sessions to ensure the Council is advised of relevant legislation and financial principles to execute parish council business effectively according to the law.

Localised working.

- We work with our neighbouring parishes under the banner of Uttlesford Association of Local Councils (UALC) to share information and understanding and to look at bringing services closer together.

Community development.

- We have engaged with the Thaxted Community Minibus to enable Sampfords residence to travel and access local amenities.

Access.

- The Council is also in the process of engaging with The One Hundred Parish Society to promote awareness of The Sampfords and “What’s On” and to attract tourism / ramblers to the area. We work with landowners, residents and other partners to maintain footpaths in The Sampfords which is important to attracting visitors through the One Hundred Society.

Recreation Ground



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- Investment has been made in an extensive outside gym that the council encourages parishioners to maximise.

Future development.

- In conjunction with the Uttlesford Local Plan, the council is preparing a Sampfords Neighbourhood Plan to look at the future development of the parish and to oversee the implementation of the parish plan.
- We have initiated a project to support Uttlesford District Council's priorities for the coming years to meet our net zero by 2030 pledge. The Council has applied for Zero Carbon Communities Grant to start a village wide initiative to lower their carbon consumption and raise the biodiversity within the village and its immediate surroundings.
- The Council is in the process of improving its parish website to provide a more informative platform together with the creation of social media pages.
- We intend to produce an Annual Parish Report providing detailed information on all parish activities and useful contact details. We also plan to produce a six-monthly Parish Council newsletter.
- It is the intention to create a regular "surgery" to make councillors more accessible and inclusive and encourage community engagement.
- Further investment is in progress to add and improve the Recreation Ground play area equipment which is expected to be in place during Q1 2025.

What do we mean by community engagement?

Community engagement can mean different things to different people, different communities and different services and situations. We have 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 Parish Council website, Facebook page, parish noticeboards 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. parish plan, questionnaires, newsletter feedback).
- **Attending meetings.** Parishioners are welcomed and encouraged to attend any parish council meeting, to put forward their concerns, suggestions or offer assistance within the 'Open Forum' section at the beginning and end of the meeting. Parishioners are also welcomed and encouraged to attend and take part in the Annual Parish Meeting. Parishioners will also be encouraged to put forward ideas and/or concerns at planned monthly surgeries.
- **Comment.** Everyone resident, visitor or partner is welcome to put forward their thoughts, ideas, concerns, criticisms or worries by telephone, email, or through the "contact us" form on the website and the parish council will consider and respond to such.



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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 individual 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

- co-ordinate 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 consider 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

- only use community engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services.
- 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 feedback 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.



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- 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.
- consider 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 measure our achievements?

It is important for the council to know whether it is achieving its 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 on an ongoing basis 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.
- **Community Engagement Officer** – who could be a parishioner elected by the Parish Council and works with the Parish Clerk to ensure development and implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy.