

COTHERSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

Governance

Author Clerk
Meeting date 9 October 2019

Review of policies

1. Planning Applications Policy

The Parish Council's Planning Applications Policy, as adopted in March 2018, is attached at Appendix 1. Revisions, shown in blue text or by text scored through, have been suggested in the light of experience in implementing the policy and in view of the requirements of the planning portal through which all Parish Council responses must be submitted.

2. Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy

The Parish Council's Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy, as adopted in May 2018, is attached at Appendix 2. The Clerk suggests that no revisions are necessary to the policy, but councillors might wish to discuss whether it remains appropriate and proportionate.

Recommendation

To review and approve any necessary revisions to the Parish Council's Planning Applications Policy and its Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy.

Appendix 1: Planning Applications Policy

COTHERSTONE PARISH COUNCIL Planning Policy

Introduction

Cotherstone Parish Council has a right to be consulted on all planning and development applications and decisions relating to the Parish Council area. It is normally given 21 days to respond to the local planning authority (Durham County Council). The Parish Council is committed to ensuring the parish has a voice in this matter, and the local planning authority has a duty to consider the views of the Parish Council when reaching a decision.

Aims of the Parish Council in relation to planning matters

1. To actively seek to protect and enhance the character and appearance of the village of Cotherstone.
2. To seek to ensure that any development, whether new or an alteration to an existing property, will be sympathetic to its surroundings.
3. To increase, wherever practicable, facilities for parishioners, to conserve wildlife, flora and the countryside.
4. To focus on sustainability.

Procedures

1. The Parish Clerk will circulate details of new planning applications and consultations to all members, via email and as sent by the planning authority, in advance of the full council meeting held each month.
2. Parish Council members have the responsibility of individually accessing the online plans and information before each meeting.
3. 'Planning Matters' is a standing item on the Parish Council's meetings' agenda.
4. All applications will be discussed openly and transparently during the Council's meeting.
5. Parishioners and the press are entitled and welcome to attend meetings and pass on their comments during public participation.
6. The council will discuss applications fairly and objectively:
 - a) Each planning application will be judged on its own merits.
 - b) All responses will be based on material planning considerations ie. the criteria by which the local planning authority will judge an application, notably whether it fulfils relevant planning policies.
7. All councillors will abide by the Code of Conduct and must declare any personal/ prejudicial interest that may preclude participation in discussion or voting.
8. The full council may undertake site visits, as appropriate and with permission, to assist in formulating the Parish Council's response, such visits to be arranged by the Clerk.
9. If an application requires a response before the next scheduled meeting of the council then the following will apply:
 - a) If the application is of a minor nature eg. garage, extension etc. then the Parish Clerk will email all councillors seeking views in line with the above. **Each councillor will be asked to state whether they 'support' or 'object to' an application or are 'neutral' about it (these being the categories under which any response must be entered on the Planning Portal). A simple majority of those responses received will be taken as the collective Parish Council decision.** Any **specific** comments, other than **'support, object or neutral'** will be collated and recirculated for approval by all councillors prior to submission to the local planning authority.
 - b) If the application is of a major nature, then the Clerk may seek from Durham County Council an extension on the time for responding.
 - c) If the planning authority is unable to give an extension to the time for responding and/or members wish to discuss the application in detail, then an extraordinary meeting of the full council will be called.

Appendix 2: Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy

COTHERSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council has a website (www.cotherstoneparishcouncil.org.uk) and uses email to communicate. Currently the Parish Council does not Facebook, Twitter or any other social media channel. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- 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;
- If it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Parish Council Website

Where necessary, the Council may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive, particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's 'rules and expectation' for the website. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the website if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

Parish Council email

The Clerk to the council has their own council email address (cotherstoneparishcouncil@hotmail.com).

The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message will be used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data Consent Form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copied to the Clerk. Note that any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council — including names, addresses, email addresses, IP addresses and cookie identifiers — even of fellow councillors.

SMS (texting)

Councillors and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this Policy also applies to such messages.

Video Conferencing eg. Skype or Facetime

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this Policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the General Data Protection Regulation in all their work on behalf of the Council

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Councillors should also be careful only to 'cc' essential recipients on emails, that is to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.