

EAST BERGHOLT PARISH COUNCIL

Media and Social Media Policy

East Bergholt Parish Council wishes to be open and transparent in the way it considers information and takes decisions. The Council will pursue appropriate opportunities to publish information about its activities with the intention of raising awareness about what the Parish Council is doing. Feedback and ideas are welcomed from the community.

Media & Social Media are simply communication channels and the responsibilities of Councillors and Parish Council employees for delivering/posting messages on behalf of the Parish Council through whatever channel is the same. They must at all times seek to be accurate, professional in tone and reflect the Parish Council's views.

The Chair, Vice Chair and Chairs of Committees can represent the Parish Council through any channels the processes set out in this policy. They can also choose, through social media channels to express personal views, which might differ from the Council's position. In this case they must make clear that the view being expressed is not the Council's view.

Any other Councillor can also choose to express their own views on topics via social media, with the same conditions as above. Other Councillors however cannot represent the Parish Council through any channel without prior approval of the Parish Council Chair.

Parish Council employees (Clerk and Assistant Clerk only) can represent the Parish Council via social media channels through delegated authority from the Chair. No Parish Council employee (including the Clerk and Assistant Clerk) can express personal views on Parish Council matters through social media channels.

Requests from the Media

- The Chairman of the Council should be aware of all approaches from the media for statements or interviews.
- Any request from the media will be considered by the Chairman of the Council who will determine the most appropriate person to make a response on behalf of the Council.

Responses to the Media

- The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council and Committee Chairs are authorised to respond to items in the media or social media which are within their portfolios, preferably following appropriate consultation.
- Every situation must be carefully assessed and in many cases a response may not be appropriate.

- Councillors who see an article/item and consider a response by the Council may be needed, should inform the Chairman of the Council/Vice-Chairman/relevant Committee Chair(s) as appropriate.
- In assessing whether or not a response is appropriate the following will be considered:

Is the article/item in question factually accurate?

Would further discussion on the subject be constructive?

- The Chairman of the Council should be made aware of any response where they were not involved in its preparation.

Media Releases

The Chairman of the Council/Vice-Chairman/Committee Chairs will identify issues and stories that have the potential to be of interest to the public.

The Chairman of the Council/Vice-Chairman/relevant Committee Chair(s) are authorised to issue media releases. A copy of the final media release will be sent to the Chairman of the Council and any Councillor who is quoted in the text prior to publication.

Media releases will be sent to relevant media outlets and will be posted on the Council's website and Facebook page.

Managing and Posting on Social Media accounts

The Council understands the need to use social media channels to stay connected to and interact with residents, customers and partners – whether as individuals, groups or organisations. Social media can include any of the following:

- East Bergholt Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro-blogging sites
- Instagram and TikTok
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums

Social media may be used by East Bergholt Parish Council for:

- Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based services, decisions and actions
- Distribution in whole or part information from council notices, agendas, approved minutes and dates of meetings
- Information specifically agreed to be communicated to residents through social media at Council meetings

- Advertising events and activities that East Bergholt Parish Council has organised or co-organised, or supports as being beneficial for the community
- Sharing good news stories relevant to East Bergholt residents
- Announcing new information relevant to people living in the area
- Providing and exchanging information about local services and events
- Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Gathering local resident's views
- Promoting cultural events or tourism happening in the area
- Advertising staff vacancies
- Sharing relevant information from partner agencies such as Suffolk County Council, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Posting or sharing relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs and charities
- Providing links to appropriate websites and other social media accounts of sites or organisations that have been approved by the Parish Council.
- Referring residents queries via social media to the Assistant Clerk for wider dissemination to Councillors if required

In the use of social media accounts the Council will seek to ensure that legal obligations and best practice guidelines are adhered to. The Council may follow or subscribe to social media accounts of other users. This does not imply endorsement of any kind. For example, links to the District Council.

Any photos published on social media channels will have the relevant permissions.

Media accounts will be updated and monitored regularly and will be non-political. Political posts will be removed and the Parish Council will not engage on issues of party politics at any time.

Inappropriate language or anything that might contravene defamation, copyright or data protection laws will be removed.

Online social media sites may occasionally be unavailable and the Parish Council accepts no responsibility for any lack of service.

Use of social media by Parish Councillors & Employees

When participating in online communication, content must:

- Be responsible and respectful, accurate, informative and balanced
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Publish original photos or videos with permission

- Always disclose the identity and affiliation to the Council, never using false names or pseudonyms
- Use good grammar and plain English

Parish councillors and council staff must not-

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers.
- Use an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing the personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of GDPR legislation)
- Offer personal opinions if they reflect East Bergholt Parish Council. If a Councillor or member of staff blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in the role as a Councillor or member of council staff, they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including council staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

Approved and adopted by East Bergholt Parish Council: 9th March 2023
Next review: June 2024