

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
HONITON TOWN COUNCIL
Revised June 2015**

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1. Introduction

Honiton Town Council's community engagement activities have been brought together into one overarching strategy for the parish and, as a result, we are aiming to better co-ordinate how we engage with all communities within the geographical area of Honiton Town – based on our belief that :

- a) All people within the Honiton community should be involved in the decisions that affect them
- b) All people within the Honiton community deserve high quality public services, shaped around their needs
- c) Town 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.

This community engagement strategy relates to the Sustainable Community Strategies of

- o Devon County Council
- o East Devon District Council

and all activities proposed by the Town Council under this Strategy will explicitly link to statements in these two Sustainable Community Strategies.

2. What is our Vision?

This strategy supports the Council's vision of Honiton as :

- a) A caring, environmentally-friendly, socially cohesive and inclusive community, harnessing the energy and creativity of all, and confident in meeting challenges and managing change.
- b) A town and hinterland well served by sports and leisure opportunities, including open spaces and paths, and other community facilities – all encouraging fitness, creativity, friendliness, confidence and inclusiveness.
- c) A vibrant local economy drawing on the strengths of a niche market town with historic character surrounded by areas of outstanding natural beauty, with further sustainable business opportunities generated by progressive thinking.
- d) A town and hinterland with a well integrated public and community transport network, and reflecting a healthy balance between the needs of motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.
- e) A good town to live and work in, to spend time and money in, and to get involved in.

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.

3. What is our overall Aim of this Strategy?

This Community Engagement Strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities that are informed and involved in decision making so that the Council is enabled to improve public services and enhance quality of life across Honiton. This is shown by :

- a) **strong communities** that can form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns

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- b) **active communities** where people are supported to improve quality of life in their own communities
- c) **inclusive communities** where all sections of the community feel they have opportunities to be involved in decision making and influence public services

4. What are our Objectives?

Our objectives identify how we will contribute to the Council's vision and ensure that the Community Engagement Strategy delivers an effective and co-ordinated approach to community engagement for the benefit of all people in Honiton.

- a) Strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their community
- b) Provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities
- c) Manage and co-ordinate engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality and partner participation and avoid duplication
- d) Ensure that community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sectors of the community
- e) Listen to communities and ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement
- f) Provide variety and flexibility and choice in community engagement activities
- g) Listen and learn from our own and others' experiences and share community engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision making

5. How will we Achieve our Objectives?

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

In particular we will

- a) Improve co-ordination and governance of community engagement activities by the development of protocols and frameworks that reach out and involve the community as a whole
- b) Develop a web-based resource to engage consultation with the local community and wider interest community
- c) Provide regular opportunities to make Councillors and Officers more accessible and inclusive
- d) Develop measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities
- e) Improve co-ordination with partners in engagement activities
- f) Raise awareness of volunteering opportunities in the Town
- g) Develop and enhance skills and expertise in engagement and participation
- h) Participate in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas
- i) Publicise our community engagement strategy through Councillors and others involved in local activities
- j) Consider any other means available to consult and engage with the public

6. 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. In particular :

- a) All Honiton residents
- b) All residents of surrounding parishes

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- c) Visitors to the Town
- d) Elected Members, who play a key part in delivering the aims of this Strategy
- e) Town Clerk and Town Council staff and volunteers
- f) Community and voluntary sector groups and organisations
- g) Partners of the Town Council

Honiton Town Council seeks to work with other organisations and groups both within and outside the parish, together with individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to ensure that engagement activities influence the future direction of the Town.

We also recognise that we need to work with our local and visiting 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 Town. We understand that sometimes people are reluctant to get involve and we will work with other partners to ensure that community engagement is as straightforward as possible and targeted appropriately.

7. What do we mean by Community Engagement?

This Strategy builds on the many good examples of community engagement activity across the Town. 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 are able to provide the most appropriate means for people and communities to be involved and give feedback. The various means of community engagement are

a) Information

This supports all types of community engagement and keeps people informed about decisions, services and local events. Our main means of achieving this are by Town Council Newsletter and Annual Report; Local Noticeboards; Town Council Websites; Link to Facebook; Leaflets; Local Media.

b) Consultation

This is used when there is a decision to be made or when there are a number of choices available. Our main means of achieving this are by Feedback from Town Council Newsletters; Questionnaires; Public Open Sessions; Town Council Websites.

c) Attendance at Meetings

All members of the public are welcomed and encouraged to attend any Town Council meeting and dates of all meetings are widely publicised through Noticeboards, Websites or direct from the Town Clerk's office. Public speaking is available at both Town Council and Planning Committee meetings and full details are widely available. Residents are also able to attend and take a full part in the Annual Town Meeting.

d) Comment

Every resident and visitor is welcome to put forward their thoughts, ideas, concerns, criticisms or worries by telephone, email or in writing and the Town Council will consider and respond to all such communications.

e) Role of Councillors

Every Councillor is involved in a range of representational roles within the community and is available to his/her electors to engage in a range of local issues, raising these with the Town Council or other body as appropriate.

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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. Our aim is to demonstrate how community engagement activity can make genuine improvement to services.

8. What are our Community Engagement Standards?

In all our engagement activities we will ensure

- a) Co-ordination and Partnership**
 - Co-ordinate community engagement activities with 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
- b) Access and 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
- c) 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 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
- d) 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)
- e) Integrity**
 - Ensure that community engagement activities are voluntary and that participants are able to 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
- f) 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

9. How will we Measure our Achievements?

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 respond to any such communication.

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Whilst this is a general strategy of the Town Council the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan will ensure that the objectives are measurable by adopting the plan within two years (mid 2017)

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

10. Financial and Risk Implications

When reviewing the budget allowance is made for an element of communication through newsletters and marketing. However major projects such as Neighbourhood Plan will have its own budget which will have to be established.

The risk register will also be updated to include these additional projects and the financial risks associated.

11. 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.

The Members will actively work to enhance community engagement activity in Council decision making

The Town Clerk is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the Strategy

Signed:..

Chairman of the Council

Signed:..

Town Clerk

Dated: 30/06/15