



# Garstang Town Council

## Community Engagement Strategy

Version Number	Purpose/Change	Author	Date
1.0 Final Version	Final version – approved by GTC	E Parry, Town Clerk	17/02/2019 215 (2019-20)

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Garstang Town Council is fortunate to operate in a place with residents, workers and business owners that care passionately about their town. Garstang has always had a community feel and this is shown in the involvement of many residents in the clubs and societies that contribute to the life of the town and its residents. The Town Council aims to build upon this foundation, helping to create a culture of participation and involvement that strengthens the sense of community amongst all residents, old and new, and gives everyone a voice in shaping the future of our town.

We believe our policies and strategies should reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations and we must also encourage and empower groups and individuals to address local needs. We hope to see Garstang flourish as a caring, pro-active community that provides for all its age groups, meets the needs of residents, visitors and businesses and takes every opportunity to help itself.

Community Engagement Strategy aims:

- Provide easily accessible and clear to understand information about our activities and aims. Raise the profile of the council, ensuring the public know who we are and what services we provide.
- Actively encourage residents to inform our decision-making process and have an input into decisions which affect the town.
- Develop the councils understanding of the needs and aspirations of the community and look to work this into our future plans.
- Ensure we use consultation and engagement appropriately, making the aims clear and sharing the outcomes of feedback or consultation.
- Adopt modes of communication which enable as many people as possible to be reached.
- Encourage community participation in local government and volunteer projects that benefit the town
- Reach out to more isolated members of the community, supporting them to participate and access groups or services
- Work more closely with individuals, businesses, community groups and organisations to achieve our agreed aims for the benefit of the town
- Build up strong working relationships within the community and encourage a sense of ownership of assets, infrastructure and new projects.
- Manage and coordinate engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality, partner participation and to avoid duplication or 'consultation fatigue'.
- Promote Garstang as a great place to live, work and visit.

## **THE COMMUNITY**

Garstang Town Council seeks to engage with all sections of the community regardless of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. This includes local residents, (particularly hard to reach groups), the local business community, the many clubs, organisations and societies which are active in the town, our partners such as the borough and county council, the neighbourhood policing team and others. The Town Council is also committed to engaging with any individuals or groups who have an interest in matters relating to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

## **SHARING INFORMATION WITH THE COMMUNITY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Principles:

Involvement Principles

1. The Town Council cannot force any individual or group to become involved but it can, and will, make it easier and more attractive to do so.
2. It will always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation event, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
3. If the outcome of a participation or consultation event is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be clear and published.
4. All involvement will be time-bound and the aggregated results will be published openly.
5. Not every decision requires community involvement.

Engagement Principles

6. The Council will be clear at the start of the event what output is expected e.g. a recommendation, strategy suggestion etc.
7. Consultation events are not intended as an opportunity for individuals with a particular interest to lobby decision makers. While individuals may well have links with groups that have a vested interest, they should not represent those groups in informing the process. The process should encourage people to take the wider view, and to ensure that those not able to be at an event have their views expressed by others.

Consultation Principles

8. Consultations will be targeted at the relevant group or groups.
9. Events will be time-bound.
10. If an event calls for wider public involvement the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.
11. Specific, non-leading questions will be asked. Questions can be open (e.g. where do you think swings should be sited?) but not open-ended (e.g. what do you think should be done?).
12. Care will be taken to ensure that no one voice is given greater weight than any other

## **COMMUNICATION TOOLS**

Garstang Town Council recognises that members of the community may wish to engage with us at different levels and in a variety of ways. On this basis we currently use various methods to actively seek the views of the community and involve them in its work:

- **Publications:** The Council communicates through regular articles in the Garstang Focus 'Green Book', and the local press where appropriate. We produce an annual report containing up to date information about payments, receipts and monies held by the council.
- **Digital:** The Town Council website <http://www.garstangtowncouncil.org> is a community resource which publishes information about the Town Parish and its Council. Agendas, minutes, accounts and other documents will be regularly posted on this website for information. The online calendar details meetings where the public are invited to attend.
- **Facebook** - <https://www.facebook.com/GarstangTownCouncil/> The council Facebook page is used to share council events where public participation is encouraged e.g. meeting and surgeries as well as notification of general activity and updates from the council and our partners.
- **Direct Access:** The Town Council will display a list of all Councillors, (addresses and telephone numbers included) together with other important points of contact on its

notice boards. This medium will also be used to directly advertise other important events e.g. casual vacancies, elections and forthcoming meetings etc.

- **Co-option:** With the exception of the full council, Garstang Town Council encourages the involvement of the community in the work of the Council through co-option. Any standing committee or working party of the council is empowered to co-opt interested members of the community onto any standing committee or working party.
- **Meetings:** Notice of all Council meetings is given on the town notice boards, the 'green book', the website and Council Facebook page. Members of the public are encouraged to attend the Annual Town meeting as well as Full Council and Committee Meetings where time is set aside for public participation. In addition to standard council meetings, the council holds regular 'surgeries' to give the public an informal opportunity to meet with councillors to discuss concerns or share ideas.
- **Surveys:** Garstang Town Council will undertake surveys and other related forms of information gathering from time to time to ascertain the community's views on a particular issue.
- **Specific Projects:** From time to time we will undertake specific projects for the benefit of the community. The normal method for undertaking these is via working parties set up under a standing committee. Co-option (see above) may be used to ensure that the community is fully represented and involved in these projects.
- The local community are invited to contact local councillors directly, or the council as a whole through the Town Clerk by email to [info@gartangtowncouncil.org](mailto:info@gartangtowncouncil.org), via the contact us form on our website, by phone - 07592 792801 or in writing to - Mrs Edwina Parry, Garstang Police Station, Moss Lane, Garstang, PR3 1HB

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS TO THE COUNCIL**

Representations to Garstang Town Council will normally be considered at the next meeting of the relevant standing committee. If they require the provision of information only, then the clerk will provide it in accordance with the council's publication scheme. The Council has a Code of Practice for handling complaints, which is available from the clerk, published on the website and reviewed annually. The publication of agendas on the website gives parishioners the opportunity to make representation to the council before agenda items are discussed. All formal representations received are responded to in writing.

### **INVOLVEMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS**

Garstang Town Council is committed to partnership working where it is clear that it will be of benefit to the town or to fulfil its statutory requirements.

### **FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS**

Garstang Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by abiding by the engagement principles and:

- Conduct a listening exercise with the community to find out what where we stand in terms of the understanding of the council and what we do, what people would like to see us work on and how people want to be kept informed. The engagement plan will be updated if required based on this feedback
- Further developing relationships with community groups and developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.

- Reviewing our current range of communications and seeking to develop these as needed to improve their quality or to reach more members of the community
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups in order to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.
- Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment of how effective and useful the consultation was.
- Work towards the introduction of a new website ensuring it is a valuable communication tool and a useful hub for accessing council info as well as details about local activities and ways to get involved.
- Review our current surgeries and look to expand them to include other agencies such as the Police and Wyre Council representatives to give residents the opportunity of speaking directly to the right people first time.