



Community Engagement Strategy

Version	Date	Initials	Comment
V1	13 th November 2017	ASZ	
V2	10 June 2024	ASZ	

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council's Community Engagement Strategy. This strategy sets out what community engagement is, why we do it and the aims and actions which support it.

This strategy is about building on the good practice which already exists in the parish and making it better. It also acknowledges the genuine desire of all partners within our community to work more closely together for the benefit of local residents.

Crucially, it seeks to ensure that the many 'communities' in Great Chart. Singleton and Chilmington have a voice in the debate around improving the delivery of local services and thus having a positive impact on life and work in the parish.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community Engagement is a term covering many different activities carried out with people who make up our communities. It is about making sure that people can participate and engage in lots of different ways to make Great Chart, Singleton and Chilmington a better place. Community engagement can happen in many ways from Parish Council Meetings, survey polls, questionnaires, big events, through to the arts, festivals and much more.

Community engagement can also take place at a number of different levels from low involvement activity to high involvement activity. For example this can range from providing information to people, to consultation by asking for feedback on a particular service or policy, to participation when decision making is shared and through to empowerment which gives people ownership of the decisions and support to carry out their own activities.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY?

Communities can be:

- Communities of Place – people within a defined geographical area like the town wards of Great Chart with Singleton North and Singleton South, Singleton East, Washford and Chilmington.
- Communities of Interest – People who share a particular experience or characteristic, such as young people, faith groups, older people, disabled people, ethnic groups or LGBT groups.

Communities may define themselves and definitions do change and people often belong to more than one community and communities themselves are often very diverse. The key point is that we always endeavour to engage with all residents.

WHY DO WE ENGAGE?

Community Engagement gives individuals, communities and partners a range of very important benefits:

- Developing a better understanding of relationship with communities through genuine dialogue
- Involving residents in public services and making sure their knowledge, experience and priorities shape those services so they are more responsive to need
- Encouraging more voluntary and community groups to become involved in planning and delivering local services
- Helping people to establish an improved sense of neighbourhood and more cohesive communities
- Engaging more people in local democracy

OUR PARTNERS

There are different partners involved in working together on community engagement:

- All residents of Great Chart, Singleton and Chilmington
- Councillors as elected representatives of their communities
- Voluntary and community groups both individually and through local organisations
- Private sector organisations, local businesses and social enterprises
- Public service providers

The approach to community engagement in Great Chart, Singleton and Chilmington is founded upon the principle that each agency; public, private or voluntary, is responsible for its own community engagement activity.

OUR PRINCIPLES WHICH SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT

Through this strategy and the engagement work we are all involved in across the parish, we aim to:

- Have clear objectives for engagement and to communicate clearly and openly about decisions and actions and the reasons for them
- Seek to reach those communities and individuals not yet engaged
- Share information and expertise
- Engage in innovative and creative ways using social media where appropriate
- Recognise and value existing channels and work to make these more responsive and effective
- Engage using a range of flexible methods to avoid relying on one source or route

OUR COMMITMENTS

Through this strategy we are committed to:

- Use the most appropriate level of involvement and participation for each activity
- Build on the existing skills of local people and communities so they are empowered to engage in decision making
- Develop the voluntary and community sector to play a key role in helping in delivering services
- Develop a culture where other peoples' views are valued and listened to and are part of the decision making process and help build cohesion in Great Chart and Singleton

The Ladder of Citizen Participation and Engagement



EMPOWER: The Parish Council empowers the Community to make independent decisions



COLLABORATE: The Parish Council and Community collaborate as equals to co-create the outcomes



INVOLVE: The Parish Council actively involves the Community and takes their input into account, but maintains the final decision-making power



CONSULT: The Parish Council asks the Community for non-binding feedback on specific decisions and policies



INFORM: The Parish Council provides the Community with transparent, relevant and up to date information

HOW WE WILL DO IT

We will provide information on our current projects, events, issues and proposed future projects through a variety of methods including:

- Quarterly newsletters delivered to every property in the parish, also being available as a digitally accessible version on our website.
- Website news section will be regularly updated.
- Social media – Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.
- Accessible council offices in the Singleton Village Hall with open door policy.
- Posters in our noticeboards.

HOW WILL WE CONSULT?

We will gather feedback on a variety of subjects and proposed projects, using various methods of engagement such as:

- An annual residents' satisfaction survey.
- Regular straw polls shared on social media and our website.
- Set up petitions on matters of importance to the community.
- Focus groups on single issue items.

HOW WILL WE INVOLVE?

We will work with residents and community groups to guarantee their concerns and aspirations are met through:

- Ensuring our meetings are open and accessible to residents, including virtual attendance.
- Encouraging attendance at our meetings and participation during public sessions.
- Networking with community groups.
- Engaging with hard-to-reach groups.

HOW WILL WE COLLABORATE

We will work directly with residents and community groups to include them in projects and events, some examples are:

- Attend stakeholder meetings.
- Appoint town council representatives to community groups.
- Appoint community representatives to our committees and working groups.
- Involve the community groups in our events.
- Work on shared projects.
- Promoting participation in the Community Hero scheme

HOW WILL WE EMPOWER

The highest level of community engagement occurs when the final responsibility for decision-making lies with communities, this can be achieved by:

- Promoting democratic elections – ensuring everyone has an equal opportunity to stand as a local councillor.

- Providing community grants to local organisations to action their own projects.
- Working in partnership with Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council to see desired improvements to Great Chart, Singleton and Chilmington.

HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS?

Measuring community engagement helps track the quality of participatory activities, improve related processes, and show residents and stakeholders how their input influences decision-making. We do this:

- Through attendance at meetings of the Council, committees and the Annual Council Meeting
- Responses received to questionnaires, surveys and polls
- Statistics from the website
- Statistics from Facebook and other social media

The parish Council's Annual Report will include a section on community engagement.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

For more information on this strategy, or to find out more about becoming involved in putting it into action, please contact Aniko Szocs, Parish Clerk:

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