

Background paper, CONFIDENTIAL to Councillors

Communications within the Parish

The question under consideration is: can we communicate better with our public and if so, how?

Background to our Parish: Demographics

The Parish has a population of about 1,800 living across some 4,000 acres. Just over 1000 live in Mannings Heath. The rest live in the other 5 settlements or scattered between them.

The 2011 Census Parish profile:

- 301 (16.9%) aged 15 and under – lower than District and England
- 1,048 (59.0%) aged 16 to 64 - lower than District and England
- 428 (24.1% aged 65 and over - much higher than District and England

Current communication devices in the Parish

1. The **Link** magazine is produced by the Parish Community Group. Coverage: delivered monthly to all households in the Parish. Requests to read it when the magazine was only available electronically was X. This would probably be a minimum readership figure and would be higher when it is delivered.

The Parish Council has a one-page article in the Link every month and big efforts have been made to make it less official and more readable. Efforts commended by the editorial team of the Link.

Suggestion: Continue, as it provides an alternative for people who do not use IT?

2. The **Parish Council's website**. Coverage: available to everyone, including all Parish residents. Statistics for week 1-7 August 2020:

- 96 Users of which 73 new users
- 132 Sessions with 340 page views

Some residents report that website is not user friendly.

Suggestion: consider further re-design?

3. The **Parish Council's Facebook**. Coverage: available to everyone including all residents. Statistics: 74 people follow and 67 people like. Clearly it is not currently well used by our residents.

Suggestion: the Clerk trials a new format to make it more attractive, quick and easy to read?

4. The **Six Villages Facebook**. Coverage: available to everyone including all residents. It has no rules for those who wish to make posts. Readership is unknown. An analysis of the last ten posts on 13 August 2020 shows the following numbers of different people making posts:

- Reliable plumber wanted.....3*
- Problems with Sky TV.....2*
- Power cut 1.....3*
- Hairdresser advert.....0*
- Cleaner wanted.....0*
- Stables for sale.....3*
- Moths.....5*
- Safari pizza.....0*
- Power cut 2.....15*
- Water abstraction.....5*

Given that about 1,800 people live in the Parish, the numbers of people posting on Facebook is small. Even when a controversial matter is raised such as The Dun Horse or the Wine Factory, it tends to be a very small number of residents who get involved. It must also be remembered that there are people who tell us that they view the Six Villages Facebook with concern and never look at it.

Suggestion: the Clerk to use sparingly for factual items only, perhaps until it is seen if the Parish Council's Facebook can attract more users.

5. The **8 Parish Notice Boards** (owned by the Parish Council and the Nuthurst Society) on which information can be posted. Readership is not known. It takes about 45 minutes to visit all the boards and pin up the notices. The boards are heavily used by many different organisations and individuals, and are often crowded.

Suggestion: continue to use for agendas and other Parish Council notices (eg Parish walks)

6. **Flyers/leaflets**

These have been used previously when the Parish Council wanted a lot of public participation during the making of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). (The level of consultation on the NP was particularly commended by the Independent Examiner and the Consultants used).

These leaflets were delivered by hand. One disadvantage of this method is the huge effort of distribution given the scattered nature of our residents' homes, especially in the hamlets. Some Councillors have walked miles delivering them! Now we have new Councillors, there may be more enthusiasm for this method of communication?

An easier method of distribution, which the Parish Council has used once, is the insertion of a stand-alone leaflet in the **Link**. (This method was used recently to gain greater public awareness of the proposed 3,500 houses at Buck Barn)

Is it likely that fewer people would read an inserted leaflet than one put through a letterbox?

One drawback of a leaflet is the considerable amount of time and ability needed to create a visually attractive leaflet with a snappy, arresting message that people will want to read.

Leaflets/flyers could be used when the Parish Council wishes to consult its residents by means of a questionnaire. But note that construction of questionnaires is also notoriously difficult.

Suggestion: use leaflets/flyers only when the Parish Council needs to disseminate very important information or has a compelling need to consult by means of a questionnaire.

7. Are there any other means of communicating?

Can Councillors think of any other means of communication?

Question for debate

So, what methods can the Parish Council take to communicate with our public?

- 1) When it has highly important information to impart; and
- 2) Routine information to impart.

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August 2020