

Community Engagement Strategy Napton on the Hill Parish Council

Introduction

Napton on the Hill Parish Council is committed to engaging and empowering its residents and continually improving its approach to community engagement.

Napton Parish Council values all of the people in the village of Napton on the Hill and recognises the enormous contribution that individuals and community organisations make to the development of the village.

This strategy builds on existing good practice and the strong tradition of community engagement. It ensures that the way the council engages with the community reflects the needs of the people that live and work here and their priorities for the future of our village are taken into account.

Napton Parish Council celebrates the diversity of the people of Napton with a commitment from the Council to address all existing inequality by building a sense of fairness, inclusion and cohesion within the community. The Council would like to ensure that particular groups of people who make a contribution to society such as young people, older people and citizens with a disability are given a voice in the decision making processes that affect them.

Napton Parish Council has, as its responsibility, to ensure that the views, needs, desires and preferences of everyone within the community -including those from vulnerable, minority and not yet reached groups – influence Parish Council strategy development.

This strategy sets out a framework to ensure that the way the council consults and engages with the community is consistent and co-ordinated, that all the community engagement activities are monitored and evaluated, and that all residents have opportunities to get involved. It also makes sure that there is a clear link between community engagement and decision making.

This community engagement strategy also responds to requirements placed upon Napton Parish Council by central government policy guidance.

Why do we need this strategy ?

Napton Parish Council's strategic approach to community engagement is driven by the needs of the parishioners of Napton in the light of all central government decisions; and the decisions made by principal authorities that impinge directly upon those parishioners.

The requirement upon Napton Parish Council to ensure that we understand the impact of important legislation such as the Local Government Act 1999, Local Government Act 2000, the Children Act 2004, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2004.

How this strategy works

This strategy sets out the council's intent and overall approach to engaging with all communities within Napton on the Hill.

Napton Parish Council shall make information available, at the earliest opportunity, as to what matters are being considered by the Council and how residents may contribute and influence decisions. Methods used to ensure this are as follows:-

- By publication of information on the Napton on the Hill Web Site at <http://www.napton-on-the-hill.co.uk>
- By posting information on the NPC notice board
- By posting notices around the village
- By publication of the minutes and notices in the Napton on the Hill & Lower Shuckburgh Parish News
- By holding public consultation meetings in the Village Hall
- In discussion, at regular monthly meetings of Napton Parish Council
- By leaflet drop, house to house.
- By holding an Annual Parish Meeting
- The Parish Clerk – the Parish Clerk plays a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and assured that they are receiving unbiased information and support, in confidence. Access to the Parish Clerk outside of the core hours may be arranged with the Parish Clerk to enable flexibility to those residents who work etc.

Engagement with the community to understand their needs and expectations will now be a fundamental part of council planning.

What is a community?

Napton Parish Council has a responsibility to engage with all stakeholders in how the parish is managed with everyone having a stake in what happens in the future and a role to play in the management of that future.

Communities can essentially be broken down into the following groups:

Parish organisations, a group of individual parishioners, businesses and other agencies and services.

This strategy focuses on these communities. It is important to recognise that communities can be defined in a number of different ways:

a community of places – defined by an area with a physical boundary, such as a housing estate, neighbourhood, or area boundaries.

a community of interest – defined by shared experiences such as a particular interest in an activity or project e.g. sports groups, church and school groups, community groups, representative bodies.

a community of identity - defined by how people wish to identify themselves or how society identifies them e.g. young people, disabled people, ethnic minority groups, the working population, men, women, business leaders etc.

a community of concern – community activists or lobby groups e.g. "Proud of My Parish".

a service user or customer community – users or potential users of primary / highways and recycling or services for specific users such as planning, sports centres or libraries.

No community is made up of people who all think the same, act the same and have the same experience or views. People will often belong to more than one community.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the process by which community organisations and individuals build ongoing, permanent and sustainable relationships for the purpose of applying a collective vision for the benefit of the whole community.

Why is community engagement important?

Community engagement is essential to improving services.

It helps to unite local people and communities, builds citizenship and community pride.

By engaging with local people, Napton Parish Council can make sure that good quality services are delivered where they are most needed and tailored to local needs. Feedback is also necessary as this acts as a check to ascertain that those services are meeting needs and any necessary improvements are identified.

Community engagement also helps to break down barriers between local people and Napton Parish Council. The council will then become more open and accessible as communities have a better understanding of how it works and the need to take part in the council decision making process at all levels.

The council recognises the need to reach out to all of its diverse communities to ensure that a wide variety of views are taken into account.

The Napton on the Hill Parish Council perspective

Community engagement is at the heart of local democracy. Napton on the Hill Parish Council believes that effective engagement must be focused on all levels through local councillors acting as elected representatives of local communities through responsibility for service delivery.

Community driven engagement

Napton Parish Council needs to ensure that it reaches out to our communities at all levels. and will involve our communities on several different levels:

This community based approach to engagement is driven by:

- **Local councillors** - local councillors are the elected representatives of their communities. By having a base in their community, they are accessible and will get to know which issues affect people. Councillors will develop an understanding of the needs and hopes of local people through engaging with them and providing representation.
- **Council partnerships** – Napton Parish Council will act in partnership with any other level of local government to promote a joined-up approach to engagement by bringing the public, private, community and voluntary sectors together. These partnerships may provide guidance in the economic, cultural, technological and environmental development of the area.

Napton Parish Council will also engage in partnership with key community-based representative groups and organisations to develop an understanding of the issues that affect citizens and impact upon their neighbourhoods and quality of life.

- **Voluntary, community and faith based organisations** - Napton Parish Council will maintain through the office of the Parish Clerk, key contacts within many voluntary, community and faith based organisations, and use this network to further engage with our diverse range of communities.
- **Community groups and residents associations** – Napton Parish Council needs to reach out to all communities through community groups such as older people’s networks, neighbourhood watch groups etc., to involve local people in decisions that may affect their neighbourhoods. Contacts with these organisations will be maintained by the Parish Clerk.

Guiding principles

Napton on the Hill Parish Council is committed to carrying out community engagement to a high standard. The following principles have been put in place to help shape and drive successful community engagement.

- **Value, know and involve our communities** - everyone has the right to feel they have an investment in council decisions and can influence and take an active role in their community.
- **Support** – identify and overcome barriers to community participation.
- **Plan well** – Napton Parish Council is committed to accessing the views of groups in the community and particularly socially excluded ones. Utilising a ‘one size fits all’ approach to community engagement will not work, so the methods used to engage communities need to be planned to make sure that they are appropriate for the area, the community, the issue and the timescales.
- **Ensure quality of methods** – Napton Parish Council through the Parish Clerk will reinforce the requirements for a high standard of quality within all of our community engagement activities.
- **Improvement of provision** – community engagement should be embedded into strategy and planning. Clear procedures will lead to changes in the way decisions are made, that actions are carried out and that the services which are undertaken are delivered so that the council can meet community expectations.
- **Communication and feedback** - people have the right to access information detailing involvement opportunities and to find out about council decisions.
- **Evaluate and learn** - community engagement will be monitored and evaluated by the parish council to ensure that it is delivering on the outcomes as brought about by this strategy.

Co-ordinating of community engagement activities

This community engagement strategy was developed during 2012 and is supported by a community engagement and consultation portal on the Parish Council website. This will help to develop our joined-up approach to community engagement.