



EAST DONYLAND PARISH COUNCIL

Serving the Village of Rowhedge

Communication & PR Policy

East Donyland Parish Council has a commitment to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. The aims of this policy are:

- To establish clear, user friendly channels of communication between East Donyland Parish Council and members of the local community.
- To identify how information on important matters affecting the community will be communicated effectively in a timely manner.
- To facilitate and encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups, and to engage with hard to reach groups.
- To promote in-depth communication in order to better understand the needs of community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities.
- Through improved communication, to raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence in the Parish Council and the services it provides.
- To make use of communication channels to proactively challenge and address any inaccuracies or misrepresentations that could undermine the image or integrity of the Parish Council.

Availability of information about the Parish Council

The Parish Council has adopted the revised model publication scheme issued by the Information Commissioner's Office in 2012, which is published on the EDPC website with a schedule outlining the range of information published by the Parish Council and where to find it. A hard copy is available on request.

A significant amount of information published by the Parish Council can be found on the website. Individuals or organisations may make a written request for other information under the Freedom of Information Act, as outlined in EDPC's Freedom of Information Policy.

Who does the Council need to communicate with?

The council's audiences are wide a varied, but include:

- Parish residents, including individuals, families, young people and older persons
- Local groups, organisations and businesses
- Colchester Borough Council, Essex County Council and neighbouring parish councils
- Third party organisations e.g. EALC, NALC, EPFA, SLCC
- Contractors and suppliers
- Visitors to the parish and other service users e.g. burial ground plot applicants

Some of these audiences are termed 'hard to reach' e.g. young people as they can be difficult to engage with and traditionally communication with them is limited.



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Communication channels

Meetings

The press and public are invited to attend all council meetings, and meetings of the Maintenance and Finance & Personnel Committees. Public participation 'have your say' sessions are included on all agenda for these meetings, and residents are encouraged to raise any issues they wish the council to consider.

Where an item for discussion is considered to be of a sensitive or confidential nature, the public and press may be excluded for that part of the meeting, as outlined in the council's Standing Orders.

The Parish Assembly is held annually, and provides an opportunity for the council to give residents an overview of the work done by the council in the previous year, and to look ahead to the major issues for the forthcoming year.

Minutes of all meetings are published in accordance with the Publication Scheme and are available online or by hard copy on request.

Face to face

The Parish Council office is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9.30am to 11.30am, and the public are encouraged to visit the office and speak with the Clerk/Assistant Clerk on any issue they may have.

Residents often speak with individual councillors regarding concerns or suggestions they may have, and councillors should refer any comments or questions to the Clerk if a council response is required (see section below regarding the role of Clerks and Councillors).

Website

The Parish Council maintains a website (www.eastdonylandpc.co.uk) which is managed by the Clerk/Assistant Clerk. The website should be updated a minimum of once per week to ensure that news articles are up to date, information is accurate and all documents that the council is required to publish are online and easy to access.

Correspondence – letters and email

In addition to the Parish Council Office postal address, the Parish Council maintains a general email account which is managed by the Clerk/Assistant Clerk as the main point of contact for residents and third parties. All Councillors and staff also have individual parish council email addresses, which they manage independently. All email accounts should be checked regularly to ensure that correspondence is dealt with in a timely manner.

All correspondence to the council should be sent via the Clerk, who will respond and/or refer the issue to the council at their next meeting as appropriate.

Councillors may receive and respond to individual correspondence from residents and third parties but it should be made clear that their response is being given by an individual and not the council, and where appropriate the matter should be referred to the Clerk.

All correspondence should be acknowledged by receipt within 2 working days, with a timescale given for a further full response if needed. Freedom of Information requests should be processed in accordance with the council's Freedom of Information Policy.



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Emails and letters should be treated in the same manner, and the tone of emails should be as professional as a written letter. All emails sent to or from parish council email addresses may be classed as a public record, and should be treated as such.

Newsletters

The Parish Council produces the Donyland Despatches newsletter on a monthly basis, which is published in hard copy within a local free publication (Colne Life) which is delivered to all households in the parish, at no cost to the council. Copies are also published on the notice boards and the website.

An electronic weekly newsletter (Friday Catch up) is sent to the council's mailing list, giving residents the latest updates on village activities, events, parish council news and local issues. All relevant information from the electronic newsletter is also uploaded onto the website. There is a regular item in the Donyland Despatches newsletter inviting residents to join the electronic mailing list to receive the Friday Catch Up emails.

Notice boards

The Parish Council maintains three notice boards, sited outside the Parish Council Office, on the High Street by Lion Quay, and on the Village Hall access road.

The Parish Council Office notice board is primarily for parish council information and posters, and community groups may only make use of it if space is available. The other two larger notice boards are provided for shared use by the council and the local community. Rules for use of the notice boards are displayed in situ, and they are not intended for commercial businesses.

The notice boards are maintained by the Clerk/Assistant Clerk, and updated on a weekly basis to ensure that information displayed is up to date and accurate, and that agendas etc which the council is required to publish are displayed in a timely manner.

Social Media

There are a range of social media channels available to parish councils as methods of communicating with residents and the wider community, including social networking sites, video sharing, blogs and micro-blogging sites, and message boards. The primary social media tools used by local councils are Twitter (micro-blogging site), Facebook (social networking) and Youtube (video sharing).

East Donyland Parish Council has a Facebook page & an Instagram account & follows the Social Media policy.

Social media should be used as a tool to both disseminate information and to engage with the community and receive feedback. As with all other channels of communication, information must be current and accurate, and in order for social media to be successful, it is crucial that accounts are regularly maintained and updated. Social media is a more transient form of communication than traditional methods, and out of date or infrequent updates will result in poor uptake and a lack of engagement.

All social media communication should be friendly and engaging, inviting the audience to participate and give feedback but retaining a level of professionalism appropriate to a local council. Individual opinions of councillors and staff should not feature on any posts or comments. Where negative feedback is received, factual and polite responses should be given and where appropriate other methods of communication offered to continue discussion and resolve any issues, rather than entering into a lengthy online debate.



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Press Releases and contact with the media

East Donyland Parish Council should produce and distribute press releases for all major projects, events and initiatives. Press releases should follow the template appended to this policy. Press releases should be prepared by the Clerk and authorised by the Chair of the Council.

When approached by members of the media, all councillors should refer them to the Clerk to respond on behalf of the council, unless an individual viewpoint is being sought. Where a councillor is asked to give their personal opinion on an issue, they are free to do so provided that they: clearly state that their comments do not represent the council as a body; do not disclose any information which is confidential or where disclosure is prohibited under law; and do not misrepresent the council.

Wherever possible, the Clerk will give a written response to the media, copied to the Chair of the Council prior to submission. Where a verbal response is given, it should be factual and clear, seeking to represent the corporate position and view of the council at that time, and not that of any individual.

Role of Clerks and Councillors

As noted above, it is important to distinguish between the right of an individual councillor to communicate with and respond to residents and third parties, and the need to ensure that the agreed position and decisions made by the council as a corporate body are clearly communicated.

Councillors are encouraged to interact with the community and should not automatically direct all approaches from the public to the Clerk; however, they should ensure that within their communication they clearly state when they are giving an individual view and when they are providing information about an agreed council policy or decision. Where a councillor is unsure of how to respond, or where a council response is required they should refer the matter to the Clerk.

The Clerk is ultimately responsible for all official council communication and must ensure that they represent the corporate position accurately and professionally, and that any advice given is in accordance with agreed council policy, procedure and best practice.

Important points to note when considering all forms of communication

Photography

The council must seek permission from all individuals before taking any photographs, e.g. at public events, including permission for any images to be used by the council in their future communications. This should include use of images online and in print, as well as submission of images to third parties for publication where appropriate e.g. as part of a press release.

Identification

Councillors and staff should ensure that they identify themselves clearly when they are entering into communication on behalf of the Parish Council or as a representative of the council. This includes ensuring that email signatures and disclaimers are correctly displayed, and wherever possible providing a method for the person involved to follow up the communication with the council.

Private correspondence / social media use



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This policy does not seek to regulate councillors or staff in their private capacity. However, all members of the Parish Council should be aware that private communication made in a public arena (e.g. facebook posts or blogs) may affect the reputation of both themselves and the Parish Council. As stated above, if a Councillor wishes to comment privately on an issue pertinent to the Parish Council they should ensure that it is clear they are stating a personal view, which is not necessarily representative of the corporate position. They should also ensure that they do not breach the disclosure restrictions identified within this policy.

East Donyland Parish Council Contact Information

Address: The Crow's Nest
1 Regent Street
Rowhedge
Colchester
CO5 7EA

Telephone: 01206 729200

Email: info@eastdonylandpc.co.uk

Website: www.eastdonylandpc.co.uk

The office is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 9.30am – 11.30am or by appointment.