Appendix [X] – Community Engagement

1. Purpose

1.1 This Appendix sets out how the Council will engage with the local community, encourage participation in parish affairs and seek the views of residents and other interested parties.

1.2 The Council recognises that effective community engagement is a two-way process. It involves not only providing information but also listening to the community, understanding local needs and taking account of people's views when developing policies, setting priorities and making decisions.

1.3 The Council aims to develop an open and constructive relationship with the community, encouraging residents to take an interest in local affairs and to contribute to the wellbeing and development of the parish.

2. Principles of Community Engagement

2.1 The Council will seek to ensure that its approach to community engagement is:

- **Open and transparent:** providing clear information about matters under consideration and explaining how decisions are made.
- **Inclusive:** making reasonable efforts to involve different sections of the community, including those who may not normally participate in parish affairs.
- **Proportionate:** choosing methods of engagement appropriate to the importance, nature and likely impact of the matter concerned.
- **Meaningful:** giving people a genuine opportunity to express their views at a stage when those views can still influence the outcome.
- **Respectful:** listening to differing opinions and treating contributions courteously and objectively.
- **Accountable:** explaining, where appropriate, how feedback has been considered and why particular decisions have been reached.

3. Methods of Engagement

3.1 The Council may use a variety of methods to engage with residents, community organisations, businesses and other interested parties. These may include:

- Time for public questions at the start of all Council meetings which are open to the public. Attending members of the public will be treated sympathetically and, at the Chairman’s discretion, may be allowed to speak further during the meeting’s debate of the matter to clarify points or reply to questions from councillors.
- Public meetings and consultation events.
- Surveys and questionnaires, whether online or in paper form.
- Invitations for written comments and suggestions.
- Engagement through local organisations, schools, churches and businesses.

- Information and opportunities for feedback through the Council's website, Facebook, monthly email bulletins, noticeboards and the annual newsletter.
- Attendance by Councillors at community events and other local activities.
- The Annual Parish Meeting and other public meetings.

3.2 The Council will seek to use a combination of methods where appropriate, recognising that not everyone has access to, or regularly uses, digital communications (Evidence – the monthly bulletin is delivered in hardcopy to about 80 homes for the mostly elderly).

3.3 The Council may also work with other organisations, including West Berkshire Council, voluntary organisations and community groups, to facilitate engagement on matters of shared interest. (Evidence – Cycleway with joint construction with WBC)

4. Consultation on Council Matters

4.1 The Council will consider whether community consultation or engagement is appropriate when developing significant new policies, proposals, projects or initiatives which are likely to have an impact on the parish or its residents. (Evidence – CIL spend consultation)

4.2 The nature and extent of any engagement will be proportionate to the significance of the matter, in particular regarding projects requiring an unusually high expenditure.

4.3 Where consultation is undertaken, the Council will aim to:

- Explain clearly what is being proposed and why.
- Provide sufficient background information to enable people to express informed views.
- Identify the questions on which views are particularly sought.
- Allow a reasonable period for responses.
- Make clear how and by when responses should be submitted.
- Explain whether the Council is seeking views on a proposal which it can determine itself or on a matter where another authority or organisation has the final decision.

4.4 Where appropriate, consultation will take place at an early stage, before the Council has reached a final decision.

4.5 The Council will consider all relevant responses received within the consultation period. It will not necessarily be possible to accommodate every view expressed, and consultation should not be regarded as a referendum or a commitment to adopt the majority preference.

4.6 Where appropriate, the Council will publish or otherwise communicate the outcome of a consultation, including a summary of the responses received and an explanation of how the findings have informed its decision.

5. Community Initiatives and Partnerships

5.1 The Council recognises that community engagement extends beyond consultation on Council decisions. It also involves encouraging residents and local organisations to participate in activities and initiatives which benefit the parish.

5.2 The Council will seek opportunities to:

- Support and encourage local community groups, voluntary organisations and other bodies and the volunteers working within them (Evidence - Community Award and Community Grant)
- Work in partnership with local organisations on events, activities and projects.(Evidence – participation in MVP events - Scarecrow Trail, Fun Day, financial sponsorship of Jubilee event, VE Day event and Transport Through the Ages event)
- Encourage residents to contribute ideas and take part in community initiatives and to take part in local democracy (Evidence –Basingstoke & Deane Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups both with majority of members non-councillors)
- Identify opportunities for volunteers to become involved in projects which benefit the parish.
- Promote awareness of local activities, facilities and opportunities for participation.

5.3 The Council may facilitate or support community events and initiatives, subject to available resources, Council priorities and any relevant policies.

6. Accessibility and Inclusion

6.1 The Council wishes to encourage participation from all sections of the parish community, irrespective of age, disability, background or personal circumstances.

6.2 In arranging engagement activities, the Council will have regard, where reasonably practicable, to:

- The accessibility and suitability of venues.
- The timing and format of meetings and events.
- The availability of non-digital methods of participation.
- The use of clear and accessible language.
- The needs of people who may face barriers to participation.

6.3 The Council will seek to avoid relying solely on responses from those who are already actively involved in parish affairs, recognising the importance of hearing from a broad cross-section of the community.

7. Responsibilities

7.1 The Council, through its Committees and individual Councillors, will be responsible for identifying opportunities for community engagement within their respective areas of responsibility.

7.2 The Community Committee will have a particular role in developing and promoting the Council's approach to community engagement and identifying opportunities for wider community involvement.

7.3 The Clerk will support the practical organisation and administration of engagement activities, including the publication of consultation information and the collation of responses, as appropriate.

7.4 Individual Councillors are encouraged to maintain contact with residents and local organisations and to bring relevant issues, suggestions and feedback to the attention of the Council.

7.5 Any communication issued formally on behalf of the Council will remain subject to the provisions of the main Communication Policy and the Council's other relevant policies and protocols.

8. Feedback and Review

8.1 The Council will seek to provide feedback to participants following significant consultations or engagement activities, where appropriate.

8.2 The Council will periodically review its community engagement activities to assess whether they are reaching a sufficiently broad range of people and providing meaningful opportunities for participation.

8.3 The Council will consider what has worked well, what could be improved and whether different approaches are needed to encourage wider involvement.

8.4 This Appendix will be reviewed periodically as part of the review of the Council's Communication Policy.