

Hadlow Down Parish Council Community Engagement Strategy

Aims and Objectives

Hadlow Down Parish Council has the aim of greater closeness with the community we serve and wants to encourage a greater involvement from the community in the decision making process. We believe that we can deliver improved services to the community if we can better understand their wants and needs and they can understand how the Parish Council works. It is important that our residents understand both the restraints on us, as well as the rights that we are able to exercise on their behalf.

We are very keen to have the “Power of Wellbeing” available for us to utilise for the benefit of the community, if the need arises. This Power lets us do things that are outside of those granted specifically by statute.

Our Community

Hadlow Down parish has about 300 homes and 600 residents. However, only about 150 residents have a footpath outside their home and those that do can only visit a small part of the Village. The remaining villagers live along the busy A272 as well as along the many side roads and narrow lanes. This makes effective communication difficult to achieve and makes the task of achieving an acceptable level of both it, and a level of mutual understanding, a real challenge.

We also have a diverse community. We have a vibrant school at St Mark’s which always has glowing reports, this leads to some parents moving to the village to take advantage of these first class facilities. We also have, at the other end of the scale, an old people’s home. Many of the residents of the village are retired and those that work invariably have to commute to their work as there is little employment in Hadlow Down.

Our housing stock is very varied, many properties being worth more than £1/2M but with many others rentable from the local authority. Properties range from 500+ years old to 1 year old.

We also have a pub, the New Inn, which is under new management now; and we have a fine church which whilst not very old is nevertheless a very attractive building.

The diversity within the Parish adds to the challenge of providing engagement at all levels and for all ages.

How we communicate

There are three methods currently in use by which our residents can find out what the Parish Council is doing and why.

Firstly, the agendas and minutes of the Council meetings are displayed in the Council notice boards at the Village Hall and in Main Road.

Secondly, the minutes are published in the Parish magazine which is delivered each month to all households who want it.

Thirdly, our minutes are also on the Village website at www.hadlowdown.com.

In addition, all the Councillors’ details appear on both the website and in the Parish Magazine.

In an attempt to further involve the Community we are now in the process of producing the first Parish Newsletter which will contain articles of up-to-date news, which we feel are of interest to everyone. We intend that this newsletter is a regular feature of our communications from now on.

Over the last 10 years we have also involved the Community in the production of 2 Village Plans which are designed to tell everyone what Hadlow Down residents consider are the important aspects of its Parish and what it wants – and does not want – that may change its environment. We use these plans, for example, to tell Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council what the Parish has decided they want so that they can take those views into consideration as part of their decision making process.

Opportunities for involvement

The Parish Council meetings are all open to the Public and we encourage public participation in those meetings. At the start of each meeting there is a period set aside for public questions and we are happy for any topic to be raised at this time. Every year there is the Parish Assembly where we try to provide a guest speaker of interest to the community and update them on the work undertaken by Councillors on their behalf. We also hold the Annual General Meeting each year and encourage participation.

All Councillors are available for informal meetings with members of the community and their contact details are in the Parish Magazine and on the website. They will also be included in the new Newsletter.

We have developed a policy under the Freedom of Information Act and the vast majority of the Council's paperwork is available for the public to read. The only exceptions are those items relating to staff issues and personal information covered by the Data Protection Act, these are, obviously, confidential

Any member of the public can contact the clerk within office hours for further information on any of the Council's activities or can speak to any of the Councillors.

Others we support

Within Hadlow Down we have a number of assets. These include the Playing Field and the Village Hall. Both of these are Charities and have their own boards of trustees and management committees. However, the Parish Council takes a role in their management with representatives on each committee and frequently has given financial assistance for major expenditure. We will continue to support these organisations for the benefit of all.

The wider community

It is easy to become introspective and to consider only those matters which directly affect Hadlow Down. However, we also support other organisations outside the Parish which offer indirect as well as direct benefits to residents.

These include the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Uckfield Railway Line Committee, the Sussex Air Ambulance Service, Sussex Records Office and the Sussex Association of Local Councils.