

RAISING THE PARISH COUCIL PROFILE

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN (27/10/2018)

The Parish Council recognises that it needs to raise its profile within the community. At one level this is a marketing issue – what is our message and how do we get that message out to the community? At another level it is about engaging in dialogue with residents.

Information about activities and events in the parish is primarily communicated through three channels, namely the Parish Council (PC) website, Village Partnership (VP) website and the Village News (VN) publication.

In this document the focus is on development of the PC website. Recommendation is to redesign the PC website to make it more visually attractive, informative and interactive such that it becomes a focal point for community debate in the village. It should also provide information about group activities and upcoming events in the village through links with the VP website as well as providing access to versions of the VN. This document offers two development options for the PC website.

The VP has the greatest number of active community representatives covering some 15 groups, with the Community Association (CA) being the largest group represented on the VP. The chair of the PC currently attends these meetings, so here we have a good opportunity to relay our message (and support) directly to the most active members of our community.

To reach a wider audience, and increase PC visibility across the community, consideration should be given to hosting an informal clinic at the monthly craft fair in the Jubilee Hall where residents can engage directly with one or more councillors.

In drawing up this document I have undertaken 4 separate actions:

- Actions 1 & 2 provide context and background information,
- Action 3 explores ways in which the PC might engage more closely with residents and
- Action 4 is focussed on PC website development.

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ACTION 1: Reviewed each of the 3 main village communication channels in collaboration with a marketing person who has developed parish council websites and who is also an experienced print publisher using professional desk top publishing tools. Comments are summarised below:

Parish Council website

The PC website shows signs of neglect, e.g. the links to some pages are broken, list of councillors is incorrect, information is out of date, there is no working link to the VP website, etc. There is no clarity about who is responsible for maintaining the site and how, in the absence of expertise on the PC, it is supported. The website lacks visual attraction, e.g. there are no images of the village, indeed there are no images at all apart from our logo. In its present state this is not a website that would encourage users to revisit it.

Village News publication

The VN is prepared using MS Publisher and as such it lacks a professional presentation or layout appearance. However, it is a community publication with a limited and defined market so layout issues are probably irrelevant to most people. The information in the VN covers a lot of community activities and the editorial team clearly have a good range of contacts across the village. The VN is essentially a provider of information. Although it accepts contributions from the public it does not specifically encourage a dialogue with the community.

Village Partnership website

The VP website uses a “free” web development platform called Wix. It is a simple website with a rolling presentation of text, images and advertisers under each menu option. There is a Facebook option built into the website. The Editor of VN manages the website, which mainly consists of posting pictures from various village events and updating text. There is currently a glitch in trying to access back issues of the VN. It contains a working link to the PC website.

ACTION 2: Contacted the Village News editor, Mike Whitehouse, to arrange a meeting to discuss future role of Village News and status of Village Partnership website.

Village News

The VN received positive feedback in the Village Plan questionnaire and is a popular village asset. It is a non-profit making venture and is produced entirely by voluntary effort with some advertising revenue from local businesses to defray production costs. The printer is Gilpin Press in Houghton and the print run costs for some 1200 copies are extremely cheap at around £240. The finished copies are sent to the distribution person who organises delivery to every home in the parish.

The VN is prepared using MS Publisher and for the foreseeable future it will continue to be produced in this way. There are plans to go to a 28 page A5 edition of VN, with the centre 4 pages being a pull-out section allocated to one of the village groups. The PC is scheduled to feature in the Summer 2019 edition.

Currently the VN just about breaks even but a few more advertisers would secure its future solvency. I suggested casting the net wider than our village to bring in advertisers from the surrounding areas. The PC has a vested interest in ensuring the continuance of the VN on

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behalf of the community, not least because we have a column in each edition. Currently the PC column consists of a fairly concise report of items and actions from previous PC meetings. Personally, I would like to see the PC column contain an element of strategic thinking about future issues facing the parish to try and engage/provoke the community into a dialogue.

Mike was wary of any apparent “political” interference in the publication by the PC but I assured him that the PC had no wish to influence publication of VN nor do I expect that we as a PC would consider a separate publication such as a monthly newsletter etc.

I have agreed to attend an editorial meeting for the upcoming VN.

Village Partnership website

Management of the website is mainly limited to posting pictures and text about various village events. It holds a list of advertisers who support the VN. There are no plans to substantially change its “look and feel” or expand its coverage. It contains a link to the PC website. We agreed that maintaining cross-links between the VP and a revamped PC websites would be beneficial and that we would continue to keep in contact.

ACTION 3: Seeking opportunities for members of the community to be able to talk to councillor(s) in an informal manner.

In addition to attendance at monthly VP meetings (and presumably meetings with CA representatives), community events such as the monthly craft fair in the Jubilee Hall present another opportunity to engage with people directly and where we could also distribute flyers reinforcing our message of community support. Recommend the PC considers taking a table at this (and similar) event with one or more councillors in attendance, where we can field comments and discuss issues with individuals informally and possibly allay some of the inevitable rumours that arise in the absence of information. At least residents would get to identify their parish councillors!

ACTION 4: Draw up a specification to redesign West Rainton PC website that includes a facility to link to VP website, incorporates VP group details and access to copies of VN.

Recommendation is to redesign the PC website to make it more visually attractive, informative and interactive such that it becomes a focal point for community debate in the village. It should also provide information about group activities and upcoming events in the village through links with the VP website as well as providing access to versions of the VN.

I looked at 4 other local parish council websites to see how they compared with West Rainton’s website; namely: Belmont, Framwellgate Moor, Pitlington and Witton Gilbert. With the exception of Framwellgate Moor, they all use the same design template that we have for West Rainton and have very similar menu options. The Belmont site is a good example of what can be achieved with this template. Unlike West Rainton, they each publish their own newsletters, although these are not as extensive as the VN. Also, none of the 4 websites has a social media connection other than an email address.

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Social media needs very careful moderation of content to avoid contentious, not to say libellous issues arising. Communication to our website should initially be via email only and that will require a member of the PC to moderate it. At a later date we could, if we felt it would be beneficial, incorporate a social media presence such as a Facebook page into the PC website.

Current status of PC website

The Content Management Platform for our website is WordPress - a popular software package for this type of website. The templates were developed by Durham CC using the Genesis framework and the website is hosted by DCC.

We have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with DCC which we purchase annually (current annual charge is £589.93) and this is subject to an annual increase based on RPI (last year it was 1.5%). A copy of the SLA is shown at the end of this document.

- Training is included as part of the SLA but there is currently a high demand/low resource so the waiting time to receive any training is likely to be quite long.
- Iain Clifford continues to provide text input to the site on a voluntary basis and support is provided by DCC as part of the SLA. Again the response time can be lengthy due to DCC resource issues.
- DCC can provide bespoke development work to include features that are outside the capability of the template. These works will be agreed prior to work commencing and charged at £420.00 per day.

Option 1:

We could call on the terms of the SLA to simply repair our existing site and that would not cost us anything, although it may take some time to deliver and we would still face the issue of maintaining and updating the site ourselves. If we wanted to include additional facilities, such as a cross-link with the VP website and incorporation of VN material, then DCC may regard these as bespoke developments and charge us at a rate of £420 per day.

Option 2:

We could go down the route of designing and commissioning our own website. If we outsourced this then we would have to buy in the technical skills to create, host and support the site (see indicative costs below). The advantage of designing our own site is the degree of autonomy and control it gives us over future developments of the site.

Whichever option we choose we still need to maintain and update the website. That means we have to identify person(s) who are willing to provide that resource and have the necessary web management skill, or are prepared to acquire such skills.

Website costs

The following indicative costs are for the development, training, hosting and support of a website similar in functionality to our existing PC website. The website would be developed using WordPress and one of its templates – a popular software package for this type of website development.

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- Development costs for a bespoke design = £600
- Training person(s) to operate/update website = £240
- Monthly hosting costs for website = £10
- Additional hourly support costs (as and when required) = £60

ICT Services



Service Level Agreement

Website Development Service

What is the service?

The service provides customers with a professionally-designed, responsive website that can be accessed on a wide range of devices. It can be updated directly by the customer, using a user-friendly interface, or by ICT Services on their behalf.

What is included?

- An initial consultation to discuss content, design and functional requirements
- The build
- A professional, responsive and consistent design
- Transfer of content, where possible, from an existing website
- Integration of social media content such as Twitter
- Training, guidance and support on the use of the content management system, allowing the customer to maintain their own images, documents and pages
- No fixed limit on how much content you can upload to your website, subject to a reasonable use policy
- Regular reviews of the website's content and structure to ensure it continues to meet statutory requirements and evolving best practice
- Telephone and email support including changes to structure and content

Exclusions

- This agreement relates only to websites built by ICT Services within our content management system, and not to those built by the customer or a third party on their behalf
- The customer is responsible for all content uploaded to the site, including pictures, text and documents
- Any non-standard functional or design requirements may incur an additional charge
- The customer must ensure they have the appropriate permission to use images and other content. This includes the written consent of the copyright holder and of the parent or carer of any child depicted
- Photographic images taken by ICT Services
- The provider will recommend appropriate file formats and settings for uploaded content to balance quality and the best use of resources in the system. The provider reserves the right to adjust any user-added content in line with these recommendations, such as reducing the resolution of pictures or converting documents to a more appropriate format, without notice.
- ICT Services registers domain names on behalf of its customers, with Nominet. To view Nominet's terms and conditions please go to <http://www.nominet.org.uk/go/terms>
- The website design and code remain the property of ICT Services and cannot be transferred to any other hosting service
- The website will be permanently deleted on the termination date of this agreement. Any content which the customers wishes to retain must be downloaded by them before this date

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