

I read through the Parish Plan and, although it is not a specific theme, the issue of poor communication between various agencies in the village and residents came up a number of times. In particular, I think many residents find it difficult to distinguish the separate roles of the Village Partnership and the Parish Council.

As was briefly touched on at the May meeting, the Parish Council itself needs to raise its profile amongst residents. At present our only means of communicating with residents is through public meetings (ill attended), statutory notice boards (hardly read) and the parish website (how many hits?). Information is available on the parish website, but it is very much a passive electronic notice board and has no real facility for interaction and feedback with the general public. The Village Partnership has its own website and a Facebook page, promoting upcoming events. The third major source of information for the community (excluding gossip!) is the Village News produced by the Village Partnership. This quarterly publication has the advantage of being delivered to every home in the parish and was well liked by respondents to the Parish Plan questionnaire.

So if raising the Parish Council profile and better communication with residents is accepted as an issue, after due consideration by the PC, then I would volunteer to take a lead role in drawing up an action plan and deliverables.

My initial thoughts – and these would of course be up for debate – is a recommendation to revamp the parish council website to make it more interactive and become the focal point for information and debate in the village. This would need to be a collaborative venture with the Village Partnership with the objective of broadening our reach into the community.

Do we have the technical skills to achieve this and (more importantly) do we have the effort to maintain a dynamic website? There may be persons in the village we could call on. In my own case I have access to a developer who specialises in developing small council websites. He is also a highly experienced print publisher.

My approach would be to enter into discussions with the Village Partnership (to gauge their response to a single village website. At the same time I would undertake a technical review of the efforts (and costs) of developing such a website. A report would be presented to the Parish Council with recommendations as to how to progress (or not).

I appreciate websites and social media are only one aspect of communication, although they are pervasive. I would expect fellow PCs to have their own views on how best to improve communications, but whatever we do, it should in my opinion be recognised that the Parish Council is in urgent need of raising its profile in the village if it is to demonstrate its continued relevance to the community.

Ian Diggory