



# High Coniscliffe Parish Council

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## COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

<b>Date of review</b>	<b>Reviewed</b>	<b>Approved</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>June 2025</b>		<b>August 2025</b>	<b>Policy written and approved</b>
<b>March 2026</b>			
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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Parish Council regarding communications and provide guidelines.

The Parish Council articulates and represents the views and needs of the local community. It provides information on important Parish matters affecting the community and encouraged comment from interested individuals and groups.

The overall aim is to make Parish Council communications a two-way process: to give people the information to understand accurately what Parish Council does, whilst enabling the Parish Council to make informed decisions using information received from residents and partners.

The principals of these guidelines apply to Parish Councillors and the Parish Clerk. It is also intended for others communicating with the Parish Council.

## **The Importance of Good Communication**

Good communication will enable the Parish Council to:

- Better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities
- Raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about issues, services and opportunities in the Parish
- Be an effective voice of the community
- Proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the image or integrity of the Parish Council or the Parish

## **Who is Communicating**

The Parish Clerk:

The Parish Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all communications with members of the community and outside bodies.

The point of contact for The Parish Council is the Parish Clerk and it is to the Parish Clerk that all correspondence for the Parish Council should be addressed.

The Parish Clerk is provided with a Parish Council email address which is to be used solely for the purposes of conducting Parish Council business.

All official correspondence should be sent by the Parish Clerk in the name of the Parish Council, using parish council 'Logo' heading, thereby making it clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Parish Council.

Parish Councillors:

Members of the Parish Council may be required to communicate both verbally and in writing with third parties and shall lodge a copy of any such communication with the Parish Clerk.

The Parish Council 'Logo' must only be used by authorised members in the day to day running of the Parish Council and its interests.

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role - enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email.

Parish Councillors should avoid making any promises to the public about any matter raised, other than to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the Parish Council or its responsibilities and depending on the issue it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- \* Give factual information and refer to the relevant minutes on the Parish websites.
- \* Refer the matter to the Parish Clerk or Parish Council who will deal with it as appropriate.
- \* Request, through the Parish Clerk, an item on the relevant Agenda.
- \* Investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Parish Council, including wording of any response.

Parish Councillors must ensure that any communication with the public on Parish Council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of the Parish Council, regardless of personal views on any subject.

### **Parish Council Meetings and Councillor Interaction**

The Parish Council meets on the third Wednesday of every month (excluding August), commencing at 18.30 hours in St Edwin's Church Hall.

Time is allocated for Public Participation, prior to the formal start of the meeting.

An initial draft of committee minutes shall be produced by the Parish Clerk and issued to Councillors for review. Subject to any amendments a subsequent draft will be issued and displayed on Noticeboards and Parish Council website within four weeks. Minutes are finalised at the Parish Council Meeting and the approved version, incorporating any further amendments, published on the Parish Council website.

Parish Councillors assigned responsibility for action(s) which involve written or verbal communications with third parties, shall keep the Parish Clerk updated and lodge a copy of any such communications with the Parish Clerk.

### **Guidance on Interaction:**

- \* Parish Councillors should always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Parish Council
- \* If appropriate, for a specific issue the Chair may authorise the Parish Clerk or another Parish Councillor to make a statement on behalf of the Parish Council
- \* Parish Councillors should not make 'personal comments' which could damage the reputation of the Parish Council or negatively impact on teamwork or credibility of the Parish Council or members of the community.
- \* Comment on matters which are, or are likely to be subject to legal proceedings should be subject to advice taken from the Parish Council's legal advisor before any response is made.
- \* On the rare occasion that Parish Councillors wish to make a 'personal statement', they must make clear that their comments are made as an individual .
- \* All media enquiries should be directed to the Chair or Parish Clerk.
- \* All media comment must accurately reflect the Parish Council's position on a topic, as adopted in documents eg minutes and policies.

### **Who We Should Be Communicating With**

The Parish Councils communications will typically include:

- \* The Parish Councils employees and contractors
- \* Ward Councillors
- \* Residents
- \* Darlington Borough Council Councillors and staff
- \* Other public sector organisations

### **How We Should Be Communicating:**

Currently the Parish Council communication is achieved mainly through:

- \* Parish Council meetings
- \* Councillor interaction
- \* The Parish Council website, managed by the Parish Clerk
- \* Notices on village noticeboards
- \* Contributions by the Chair and Parish Clerk to a Parish newsletter
- \* Information notices/updates hand delivered throughout the Parish
- \* St Edwins Church newsletter

### **Website:**

The Parish Clerk is responsible for the Parish Council website which is to be regularly updated with content that is objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

### **Village Notice Board:**

The village notice board will be kept updated, to ensure that members of the community who are less active online are kept aware of key information.

**Newsletter:**

The Newsletter and Update information is currently delivered by hand to all households in the Parish.

**Publications:**

The Parish Council publishes its policies and other important information on its website.

The Parish Council will continue to explore ways in which communication could be improved.

**Media – Manage the Media Effectively**

Key Points for effective Management of media relations are:

- Respond to Journalists in full within a reasonable time.
- Be helpful, polite and positive.
- Never say 'no comment'.
- Ensure all statements or responses to hostile enquiries are cleared by the Chair or the Parish Clerk.
- Evaluate media coverage.
- Issue timely and relevant press releases.
- Pre-empt potential stories arising from Parish Council agendas / minutes by issuing proactive PR, where possible.