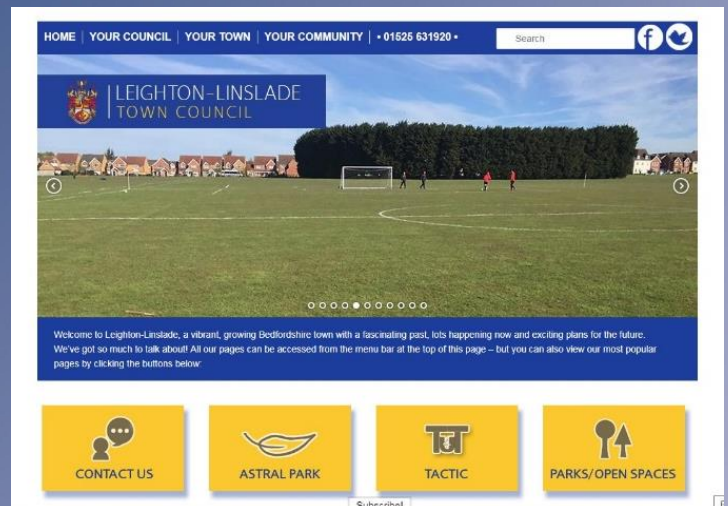
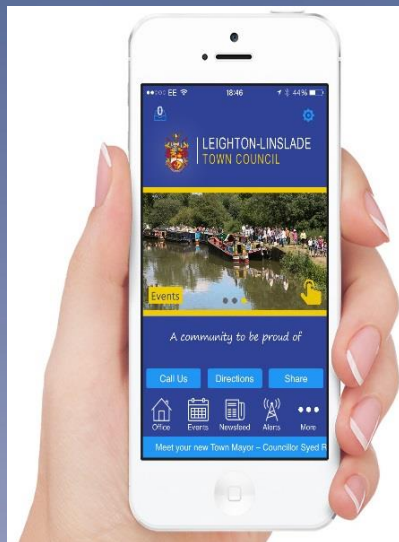
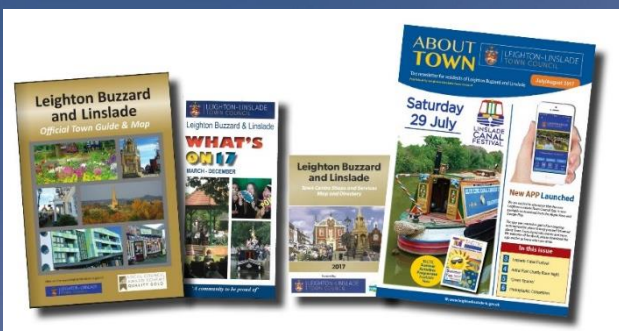


# Community Engagement Strategy 2024





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**LEIGHTON-LINSLADE  
TOWN COUNCIL**

**Responsible for:**

- Allotments
- Bus shelters
- Cemeteries
- Christmas illuminations
- Community events & promotions
- Grants to voluntary organisations
- Markets
- Parks and open spaces
- Pavilions – Astral, Pages Park & Mentmore
- TACTIC, Teenage Advice & Information Centre
- Multi-Storey Car Park Toilets

## 1.0 Introduction

Effective and meaningful community engagement is at the heart of the Localism agenda: driving towards provision of better services, a stronger public realm and more cohesive and sustainable communities.

This strategy sets out an approach to the way in which the Town Council engages with the local community, enabling us to seek views from residents and stakeholders, to involve and work with partners, to deliver the vision for the parish of Leighton-Linslade both now and in future years.

Community engagement is about giving local people a voice about matters which may affect them, their community and their neighbourhood. The Town Council will seek to promote a listening culture.

## 2.0 Aims, Vision and Objectives

### Aim

The ultimate aim for our communications is to ensure that residents, partners and stakeholders are kept well informed and have an opportunity to influence outcomes, by making their views known. By stakeholders, we mean everyone who has an interest in the parish.

### Vision

‘A community to be proud of’



## Objectives

- To provide high quality services and promote a sense of wellbeing by making the right choices.
- To engage and consult with the community
- To raise the profile of Leighton-Linslade Town Council (LLTC), its facilities and services to maximise access to them
- To provide an opportunity for residents, community groups and other stakeholders to influence outcomes
- To raise awareness and seek public support for the town council's projects and initiatives
- To make ourselves easy to reach and talk to - promote a listening culture
- To make people feel better informed and proud to live and work in Leighton-Linslade
- To make sure parishioners know the outcome of the changes and decisions we make as a Council
- To co-ordinate communications to ensure consistency in style and content of messages
- To build a strong perception of the council as a professional organisation
- To create and maintain a strong and consistent identity (brand) for the Council and its services
- To promote social wellbeing and a sense of community
- To support and promote local business development

## Engagement

- To provide mechanisms for the local community to express views or ask questions
- To involve local voluntary and community groups and other stakeholders in the decision making process
- To seek to inform and educate
- To ensure information is easily accessible through a variety of media
- To seek to involve harder to reach groups within the community, for example young people
- To work in partnership with other public sector bodies on matters affecting the local community (e.g. Bedfordshire Police, Central Bedfordshire Council, NHS Integrated Care Board)
- To manage expectations
- To raise awareness

### 3.0 Guiding Principles

In engaging, the Town Council will use the following guiding principles:

- Use of clear, concise and relevant language – avoiding use of jargon as much as possible
- Provide everyone with the opportunity to get involved, if they want to
- Be clear about what can realistically be achieved
- Promote a positive approach which is constructive and encourages involvement, but also demonstrates clear links between the activities and the benefits to the community
- Aim to provide feedback to residents to demonstrate the value of the engagement process
- Continue to explore new ways of involving all in the Council's activities
- Wherever possible, engage stakeholders at an early stage in the process and allow sufficient time for responses to be formulated
- Aim to engage all sections of the community, including those which are usually harder to reach
- Consult with and involve relevant specialist or sector bodies, if appropriate
- Ensure information is available in accessible formats

The Town Council has signed up to the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact, which sets out the core principles that the public sector and the voluntary and community sector share and demonstrates a commitment to those sectors working in partnership. The Compact principles are as follows:

**Respect:** differences between the public and the voluntary and community sectors are mutually understood, acknowledged and respected.

**Honesty:** open communication, transparency and integrity.

**Independence:** the independence of voluntary and community organisations in fulfilling their mission is recognised and supported. This includes their right within the law to campaign, to comment on and to challenge public sector policy.

**Citizen empowerment:** valuing a thriving civil society that is built around communities and people, meeting their needs and reflecting their choices.

**Volunteering:** the energy and commitment of people giving their time for the public good contributes to a vibrant society and should be recognised and appreciated.

The Compact sets out the commitments on both sides in respect of advancing equality and diversity, involvement in policy development and allocating resources.

More information can be found at: [www.bedsandlutoncompact.org.uk](http://www.bedsandlutoncompact.org.uk)



The Town Council is also mindful of the consultation principles published by the Government in 2018, based on the Gunning Principles:

- Consultations should be clear and concise
- Consultations should have a purpose
- Consultations should be informative
- Consultations are only part of a process of engagement
- Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- Consultations should be targeted
- Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
- Consultations should be collectively agreed before publication
- Consultation should facilitate scrutiny
- Responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion
- Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods.

## 4.0 How do we communicate and engage?

Our commitment is to use a multi-channel approach to reach as many people and organisations as possible. The communications mix is ever changing, with a clear channel shift towards online and digital methods and tools in recent years.

The Council currently uses a wide range of communication channels which include:



Different target audiences have specific information and communication requirements. The Town Council will continue to use as broad a range of communications methods as is practicable in order to reach everyone.

In determining which communications methods to use for which messages, the Town Council will consider factors such as target audience, financial cost, available resources and timescales.

### Connecting with our audience

In recognition of the changes in the way our society communicates, the Town Council has in recent years expanded its use of digital communication platforms. Digital media communications enable people to access information almost instantly and provide a mechanism to share information with others, submit queries or make comment.



## Websites

In addition to its primary website ([www.leightonlinlade-tc.gov.uk](http://www.leightonlinlade-tc.gov.uk)), the Town Council also now manages and maintains four additional website domains:

- Astral Park Sports and Community Centre [www.astralpark.co.uk](http://www.astralpark.co.uk)
- TACTIC [www.tactic.co.uk](http://www.tactic.co.uk)
- Leighton Buzzard Market [www.leightonbuzzardmarket.co.uk](http://www.leightonbuzzardmarket.co.uk)
- Leighton-Linslade in Bloom [www.leighton-linsladeinbloom.co.uk](http://www.leighton-linsladeinbloom.co.uk)

The websites provide a broad range of information on the services offered by the Town Council and includes a mechanism to submit queries or booking enquiries. The Town Council also publishes at least 2 years' worth of the agendas and minutes of all formal Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings on its website.

In accordance with The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018, town council websites are regularly reviewed to ensure compliance and that data is presented in an accessible format.

## Social Media

Social Media has become an integral part of the communications mix for the Town Council. A number of pages and profiles across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube enable connection to different elements of the services we provide. In addition to raising awareness, providing information, promoting events and seeking feedback, social media also provides us with a mechanism to help share messages from partners and other stakeholders, which may be of interest to the community.

Taking a step further in the arena of digital communications, the Town Council launched its app in June 2017, in recognition of the increasing number of people accessing information via the internet on hand held devices. The app will be redeveloped and relaunched in 2024.

## Publications

**About Town** is our quarterly newsletter which is produced in-house and will be delivered to every household from February 2024. The newsletter seeks to inform residents about a range of events, projects and services as well as celebrating local good news stories. The newsletter can be downloaded via the website and we also distribute the newsletter digitally via email and will continue to encourage everyone to sign up for this service via

our website. In the longer term, we hope to reduce reliance on paper by encouraging digital access to the newsletter or Town Council app.

The **Five year plan and Objectives** provides an overview of what we as a Council are responsible for and outlines our corporate objectives for the next few years.

The **Annual Report** is published in June each year. This publication provides details of Town Council projects completed during the year and provides update on corporate objectives.

A **What's on Guide** is created and released before the end of March each year. This publication showcases all of the Town Council's upcoming events and projects. Long standing larger events organised by outside parties are also included.

The **Official Town Guide** is created and published bi-annually by Local Authority Publishing, funded by business adverts within the publication. The guide also contains a map of the town.

## Press

The Town Council will use local press (newspaper, radio) as appropriate communication with the community. In many cases this information is also disseminated on the internet by the relevant organisation.

Paid for press advertising will only be used when sufficient budget is available.

## Consultations, Exhibitions and Surveys

There may be occasions when the Town Council wishes to consult with a specific section of the community – for example on proposals for an area in their neighbourhood – or to consult with the wider population – for example on corporate objectives for the town as a whole. The Council will seek to publish information and invite comment in as many forums as possible, depending on budget, resources and timescales. This may combine traditional methods (posting letters through doors, using noticeboards) with digital media (website, app and social media). Should time and resources permit, activities may also include face to face or telephone surveys, or open events/exhibitions.

Often there is no statutory duty to consult, but the Town Council will endeavour to do so, where deemed appropriate, on matters for which it is directly responsible.

## Meetings

All formal meetings of the Town Council, its Committees or its Sub-Committees are open to the public and include a public forum to ask questions or make comments on items included on the meeting agenda. Meeting dates, agendas and minutes are all published on the Town Council website, as are guidance notes for people wishing to attend a meeting. We welcome participation at meetings by residents, groups and partners.

The Annual Parish Meeting, called in accordance with legislation by the Town Mayor each March, provides a forum for any member of the public to ask any question of the Town Council. The format of the Parish Meeting will normally include a brief presentation and then an open forum for questions.

## Noticeboards

The Town Council recognises that despite the huge increase in digital engagement, there is still a place for the community noticeboard. The Council maintains several noticeboards located within the town centre and across the parish. Space is limited but the Council will endeavour to publish key information and also aims to support local charity, voluntary and community organisations by putting up their notices when space and resources permit.

## 5.0 Outcomes and Decision Making

Increased levels of consultation and engagement invariably lead to raised public expectations. Consultation rarely results in single opinion and may not always generate clear or conclusive results; nor is it synonymous with consensus. Understanding the views of local residents and stakeholders is important and will help inform and improve the decision making process, and help strengthen involvement in civic life. However, it cannot be a substitute for the democratic process.

Elected Members of the Council, along with senior officers, will need to weigh the views and opinions expressed through consultation against a wide range of other factors such as legislation, government or sector guidance, demographic data, economic factors, environmental and social impact for example.

Unless delegated to the Town Clerk, decisions must be made by Council or a duly authorised Committee. Decisions are always made by majority vote, following a full appraisal of the facts in order to make balanced and appropriate decisions. In making decisions, the Council must weigh up a number of factors, including not only the aspirations and wishes of the current population but also future generations. The Council must also consider the needs of the

Parish as a whole when making decisions, not just reflect the wishes of a minority, which may conflict with the needs of the Parish as a whole.

For these reasons, it is important to be aware that the final decisions made by the Council may not always reflect some of those views expressed during community engagement and consultation.

Decisions made by the Town Council are final and may only be reversed in exceptional circumstances, in accordance with Standing Orders.

## 6.0 Other Relevant Documents

The following documents may provide further useful information in addition to that outlined within this Strategy:

1. Social Media Policy
2. Publication Scheme
3. Freedom of Information Policy
4. Town Council Standing Orders
5. Town Council Financial Regulations

Adopted January 2024



LEIGHTON-LINSLADE  
TOWN COUNCIL

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