BARLING MAGNA PARISH COUNCIL

Report to: Full Council

Report from: Clerk

Date: 17January 2019

**SOCIAL MEDIA ISSUES**

1. Background
   1. The Parish Council currently lacks any effective means of live-time communication with all its residents. At present we tend to rely on passive, slow and third-party means of communication which do not serve our local population well. This paper recommends ways to achieve a transformation in the Council’s use of free social media to provide good quality, factual, accurate and timely information for those living and working in the parish.
   2. As a relevant background document, the Council approved a Social Media Policy for members of the Council on 12 April 2018. The policy can be found in the ‘Policies’ section of the Council’s website. It is due for review this year. Members are requested to review the policy ahead of the meeting so that it can be approved for another year.
2. Current position
   1. It has been apparent for some months that there are various social media accounts in the name of the Parish Council which remain ‘live’ but without current content, controlled by third-parties. Three of these were created in 2014 by a then-serving member of the Council. It is understood that these accounts were set up in good faith but apparently without the full authority of the Council. When the issue has been raised previously, members have agreed that it is unfortunate that these accounts exist outside the control of the Council, since it would also be impossible to moderate any untrue or unhelpful comments posted. There is also the missed opportunity to use them for good.

* 1. I am pleased to report that, owing to the kind co-operation of former members of the Council as well as some guesswork, the following social media accounts are now under the sole control of the Parish Council, through the clerk:

1. @barlingmagnaPC (Twitter account)
2. Barling Magna Parish Council (Facebook account)
3. Barling Magna Parish Hall (Facebook page)
4. Friends of Barling Magna Wildlife Park (Facebook group)

I make recommendations about what to do with these accounts at the end of this report. I have provided the Chairman with confidential log-in details in a sealed envelope as a safeguard.

* 1. At present, the Council’s only means of live-time or rapid communication with residents has been through:

1. posting papers on its four physical noticeboards
2. its website [www.barlingmagna-pc.gov.uk](http://www.barlingmagna-pc.gov.uk)
3. by asking Council members to post on social media sites to which they have access.

Live-time communications matter when there is an emergency or where residents would be assisted with up-to-the-moment information on such topics as sudden road closures, snow drifts, flood or to be the first source of good news.

* 1. I propose that the Council should use the Twitter account named above to serve as a news-feed. Non-Twitter users can see the current content here: <https://twitter.com/BarlingMagnaPC> It is unknown how many local people use Twitter but we can slowly promote this and, if automatically linked with our website, the same news items will appear on both. This will boost the currency of our website in Google and other search engine ratings, which will mean that our site should shortly become among the top-listed in any internet search on “Barling” or variant terms.
  2. Members may have gathered that I believe that the website, as current configured, is neither helpful as a communication tool nor attractive. It is also very little accessed by the public. Council has agreed previously that it wishes to move to a more dynamic website with the aim of this becoming – over time - the essential ‘go-to’ source of information about their community for residents. It would also serve as a showcase for the good work done by the Council as well as other community ventures.
  3. Recently, Council discussions have focussed upon creating a new website. Rather than immediately move to create or commission a new website, I propose that you instruct me firstly to negotiate with the current web master to explore the scope and costs of making the following changes to the existing site:

1. Make the home page of the site more dynamic and current, with changing background photographs (e.g. the recent Photography Competition entries) and a feed from the Council’s Twitter account.
2. De-clutter the site, removing redundant pages which have never been used (we can always add more later).
3. Improve the design of the pages using brighter, more vibrant spot-colour in place of the grey
4. Tidy up the downloads pages by creating archive links to former years’ agendas and minutes
5. Make the website GDPR-compliant (which it isn’t now) with a cookie-consent pop-up.
6. Provide the clerk with improved access to the site’s analytic data, which tracks how the site is used so that we can see what residents find most useful.
7. Introduce a new “Report a faulty streetlamp” feature
8. Empower the clerk with the tools to be able to make postings to all pages. At present, apart from the pages relating to agenda, minutes, policies and photographs, all changes to the information on the site must be made by the web master. Though not a computer nerd[[1]](#footnote-1), I have operated a WordPress website previously.

In my opinion, these changes should be easy to implement and should not incur major fees - certainly below the fee of commissioning a site through one of the bulk providers of Parish Council websites. If, for any reason, it is not possible or economic to revise the existing site then you can decide on alternatives.

1. Recommendations

Council is recommended to discuss and approve the following:

1. To adopt the social media accounts listed at 2.2 above as official Council-controlled accounts.
2. To authorise the clerk to serve as administrator of these accounts and to make postings in the Council’s name, where appropriate, to provide factual and relevant information to residents. Any such postings to be available for inspection by all Council members.
3. Given the importance to the Council’s reputation for any unhelpful or inaccurate postings by third-parties to be moderated with courtesy and diplomacy, the clerk should be authorised - in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman – to moderate any such and report subsequently to Full Council.
4. To instruct the clerk to negotiate and agree with the current web services provider to bring about the changes in 2.6 above up to a maximum fee (to be discussed).
5. To consider the Social Media Policy reviewed for 2019.

IK – 17.1.19

1. A technical computing term [↑](#footnote-ref-1)