



# WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE TOWN COUNCIL

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY**

*Adopted March 2016*

### **Introduction**

1. This policy sets out Wotton-under-Edge Town Council's approach for engaging with the community.

### **Aims**

2. The aims of this policy are to:
- work more closely with residents, businesses and community groups to achieve agreed objectives for the benefit of the town;
  - engage with as many people as possible who want to participate in community decision making, monitoring services, facility provision and planning for the future;
  - ensure, through the use of a wide range of community engagement approaches, that the Council takes community views into account in its decision making;
  - ensure that residents are well informed about the Council's business and have every opportunity to present their views;
  - enable an involved, empowered and active citizenship of all ages;
  - raise the image and reputation of the Council;
  - enable all Councillors to maximise their role as elected members and community leaders;
  - ensure that the Council's priorities are well understood by all.

### **Outcomes**

3. This strategy is part of the Council's commitment to creating and maintaining effective working relationships with all sectors of the community, based on trust, openness and co-operation.

4. The intended outcomes of this strategy include:
- Improved communication through establishment of effective channels of engagement;
  - Greater community awareness of the role and business of the Council;
  - Improved engagement with local communities and groups, with more people feeling that they are involved in local decision-making;
  - More people involved in volunteering for community organisations;
  - Improved satisfaction with local public services.

### **Defining the Community**

5. Wotton-under-Edge is a small Cotswold town, situated under the Cotswold edge at the very Southern end of both the County of Gloucestershire and the District of Stroud. It has a population of about 5,600 and an electorate of 4,500. The town acts as a service point for a large hinterland, including some villages in the neighbouring authority of South Gloucestershire. The centre of the town, one of the District's former market towns – which grew as a wool and cloth trading centre – is a conservation area and sits within the Cotswolds AONB.

6. The town has a range of independent shops and is also home to several successful companies. There are two small employment sites in the town and the

area's major employer, Renishaw plc, has its headquarters in neighbouring Kingswood Parish. There are two banks, doctors, dentists, public houses, estate agents and numerous other services available in the town. There is a historic parish church together with several other churches and chapels. All of these services and facilities mean that most requirements for daily living can be obtained in the town

7. Physically isolated both by its geographical position and a lack of good public transport, the town has traditionally and remains currently in the habit of meeting many local social needs independently utilising significant volunteer effort.

8. The town has historically provided access to good schooling for local children. There are two primary schools (The British School and the Bluecoat School) and one secondary school (Katherine Lady Berkeley's) which has a Joint Use Sports Centre, operated in conjunction with Wotton Community Sports Foundation (WCSF). In addition, WCSF has undertaken a major project to provide more sporting facilities on the New Road site (known as Wotton Parc). Two new all weather pitches were opened in 2014 and a skatepark opened in 2015. Future plans include constructing a safe access pathway between the town and the Parc, jogging and BMX tracks, a children's play area, changing rooms, a sensory garden & memory walk for the disabled, and more woodland planting and an orchard.

9. There are three sets of almshouses still in active and much valued use, each managed by their own Trustees. The town has a large and active community of volunteers who provide or manage various community venues and facilities, including an open air swimming pool, an active Arts Centre, a Heritage Centre, Bowling Green (all in premises let to them by the Town Council/Trust), a Jubilee Playing Field and a fully digital community Cinema which generates a loyal following from near and far. There are something like twenty six meeting rooms of various sorts, from scout huts to church rooms, all in active use. The Town Council encourages and supports local groups in providing these important and valued community assets without having to provide and manage all of them itself.

10. The community may be defined as consisting of:

- Residents of the parish of Wotton-under-Edge;
- Retail and businesses in the area;
- Head teachers and Governors of the local primary schools and the KLB comprehensive;
- Young people who live and/or attend schools in the Parish;
- The Police, Fire & Rescue and Ambulance Services;
- Farmers' market traders;
- Local clubs, societies and community interest groups;
- Voluntary and not-for-profit organisations;
- Residents with disabilities or illness, both mental and physical;
- Church and faith groups;
- Other groups of people defined by a common factor such as age, disability, faith etc;
- Tenants of Town Council's allotments;
- Councillors and public service representatives including Council staff;
- Tourists and visitors to the town;
- Those providing other public services in the Parish.

## **Role of Council Members and Officers**

11. Wotton-under-Edge Town Council was established, originally as a Parish Council following local government reform in 1896. Town Status was restored in 1976.

12. There are thirteen Town Councillors and there are no political groupings in the working of the Council. It is an active council that is committed to improving the quality of life for all members of its community. The council provides support to a range of partner organizations involved in regeneration and meeting the social needs of its residents.

13. Full Council meets on a monthly basis, and there are Standing Committees, dealing with Finance & Special Purposes, Planning, Allotments, Regeneration and Footpaths & Amenity.

14. The Town Council office is at the Civic Centre, 2 Gloucester Street, Wotton-under-Edge, GL12 7EA. The Civic Centre houses the council offices, a “One Stop Shop” (where local people can access services by principal authorities, the CAB and can also obtain information on many topics), community facilities and three community rooms, together with the adjoining car park.

15. The Town Council is also Trustee of the Wotton-under-Edge Town Trust which holds land and buildings historically owned by the Mayor and Feoffees and in that role, manages those properties which include the Listed Town Hall, Chipping Hall, Chipping Club Room and Youth Centre. The Trust also owns the Heritage Centre which is managed by volunteers from the Historical Society and the Chipping Car Park managed by the District Council. The Trust has separate accounts and meetings from the Town Council.

16. In addition the Council provides the Town Cemetery (and maintains the Parish Churchyard), a children’s play area, two sets of allotments, a streamside walk and amenity land, woodlands and the town CCTV system. It has recently converted the former Police Station to a Youth Centre, and funds youth workers to run sessions at the Centre. The Council is actively involved with the local Youth Liaison Committee. The Town Council was a founder member of the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum.

17. Contact details for the Town Councillors are made available to all residents in the annual town council handbook and on the Town Council website.

18. Councillors actively engage in communicating with their residents, face-to face, and responding to telephone calls and e-mails with swift follow-up action. In a private capacity, many belong to local clubs and organisations, where they may, if they so wish, promote the work of the Town Council and be available to residents. Councillors also act as trustees to local charitable groups.

19. The Town Council Office is staffed by the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk who are available to the public on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 9am and 12.30pm and outside these times can be contacted by telephone, e-mail or personal appointment.

20. The Council employs a Buildings Manager, who checks the condition of council buildings on a regular basis, carries out certain ground maintenance work and undertakes required maintenance actions. A part-time caretaker is also employed.

### **Provision of Information to the Community**

21. The “One-Stop-Shop” is open every weekday between 0900 and 1230. The One-Stop-Shop is the main source of council information for residents and visitors.

22. The Town Council has notice boards at the Civic Centre, One Stop Shop and at other locations in the town. The Civic Centre notice board displays contact details for the Town Clerk, notices and agendas of Town Council and Committee meetings. Community information is displayed in the One-Stop Shop. Other notice boards serve different areas of the town.

23. The Town Council web site address, [www.wotton-under-edge.com](http://www.wotton-under-edge.com) is widely published and the site contains all the information an individual might wish to know about the Town Council, such as minutes of meetings, policy documents, accounts, annual report and contact details for the Mayor and Town Council. Agendas and minutes of meetings are also available in the Town Council Office.

### **Opportunities for Community Involvement**

24. Wotton-under-Edge Town Council engages with the community in a variety of ways, from use of notice boards, the web site, through to the Annual Parish Assembly and occasional public consultations on specific issues.

25. Active feedback is sought at all times and Councillors work to encourage people to participate in local affairs, with specific local issues being explored from time to time using the full range of communication techniques available, including by letter, e-mail, facebook, twitter or attendance at Council meetings. The Council always considers practical ways of engaging with people and community groups and have issued town questionnaires to canvass local opinion.

26. The following Council meetings include members of the public as members:

- Allotments
- Footpaths & Amenity Areas
- Town Regeneration Partnership

### **Opportunities for Formal Representations to Council**

27. The Town Council welcomes representations from the public and local groups on matters of local concern or interest at meetings of the Council.

28. The Council invites public participation for a ten minute slot at the commencement of each Full Council and Planning Committee meeting. Prior notice of intention to speak should be given to the Town Clerk.

### **Involvement in Partnerships**

29. Wotton-under-Edge Town Council is committed to partnership working where it is clear that this will be of benefit to the town or to help fulfil its statutory requirements.

An example of this is the Council's CCTV system which has been part-funded by the PCC. CCTV use has helped combat crime and make the town a safer place to live and work and the Council works in partnership with the local police service to provide CCTV images when these are needed assist with crime investigation.

30. At the invitation of various groups and organisations, the Town Council has a representative on a number of outside bodies, these being:

- General Charities
- Combined Charities
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Wotton & District Recreational Trust
- Beaumont-le-Roger Society
- Youth Liaison Committee
- Wotton Community Sports Foundation
- Wotton in Bloom
- Chamber of Trade
- Police Stroud Cluster Group
- Synwell Playing Fields Committee
- Wotton Swimming Pool
- Heritage Centre

31. Other societies in the town include:

- Civic Society
- Historical Society
- Round Table
- Lions Club
- Probus
- Wotton Silver Band

### **Specific Areas for Community Involvement**

32. The Town Council is currently working with community representatives on updating the town's 2005 Community Plan and organising a Spring Walking Festival.

### **Complaints**

33. Wotton-under-Edge Town Council has a policy for handling complaints. This is available from the Town Council Office or from the web site.

### **Action Plan**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Mayor & Deputy Mayor	Encourage Mayor & Deputy Mayor to fulfil their Civic Role & encourage community organisations to invite the Mayor to events	Staff, Mayor & Deputy Mayor	Ongoing
Minutes	Ensure copies of approved minutes are available in both hard copy and electronically for residents and community groups	Staff	Ongoing

<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Annual Report	Ensure Annual Parish Report is available by both hard copy and electronically for residents and community organisations	Staff	Annually
Office Opening Hours	Publicise office opening hours in any town council publications and on website & noticeboards	Staff	Ongoing
Annual Town Meeting	Publicise widely the Annual Parish Assembly Meeting to enable residents to raise matters of interest or concern to the Town Council	Staff	Annually (in March)
Public Forum	Encourage residents to raise any matters of interest or concern via the public forum part of Full Council and at Planning Committee Meetings	Staff & Members	Monthly
Noticeboards	Regularly update noticeboards with council & community activities	Staff	Ongoing
Website	Maintain website with information on council services & activities	Staff	Ongoing
Local Joint Committees	Nominate a Councillor to represent the interests of the Town Council on the various Local Joint Committee Meetings	Members	Ongoing
Businesses	Engage with the businesses and business organisations	Staff & members	Ongoing
Residents Association	Encourage Councillors to attend community organisation Meetings	Members	Ongoing
Local Democracy	Encourage Residents to both vote at and stand for the Town Council in Local Council elections	Staff & Members	Ongoing but high priority in the six months leading to local council elections
Press	Liaise regularly with the press sending details of council meetings and council activities	Staff & Members	Ongoing in accordance with Media Policy
District and County Councillors	Maintain contact with those District and County Councillors who are not also Town Councillors to ensure sharing of information and details of issues	Staff & members	Ongoing

*This policy document is to be reviewed and updated every two years or after legislative changes*