

Blisworth Parish Council - Electronic Communication Policy

Introduction

The Parish Council understands that the use of digital and electronic communication enables it to interact in a manner that improves the communications both within the Parish Council and between the Parish Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Parish Council has a website and uses email to communicate. The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Should the Parish Council add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers, this policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements. Councillors and the Clerk may also use other forms of digital communication, such as text messages, for convenience. This policy also covers all digital communications.

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) councillors should be aware of the risks and data protection obligations and responsibilities, particularly with regard to use of personal email addresses. The Parish Council has obligations relating to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal data it holds. This means that the Council is accountable for any Council business conducted involving personal data on any device or through any email account.

The use of personal devices and email accounts could raise the risk that personal data is processed for different purposes from which it was originally collected. All members of the Council should ensure they know their responsibilities in terms of only using personal data for the purposes which the Council obtained it.

Individual email addresses have been set up for Councillors which will help to ensure the confidentiality and security of Parish Council documents. By having a separate email for Parish Council work, all documents can be organised in the same place on your device making them easier to find.

Each councillor will use a unique email address using the format, blisworthparish'surname'@gmail.com. When set up, the Clerk will ensure that your personal email address is no longer used and all correspondence is directed to your 'councillor email address'

Parish Councillor email addresses should:

1. Only be used for Parish Council business
2. Not be used to register on any shopping or social media site or system that is not Council related, such as a personal Facebook, eBay, Instagram or Twitter account
3. Not be used in connection with running or managing any business or for commercial activity
4. Councillors should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails and avoid use of a group recipient email, i.e., Councillors should avoid 'send to all' to help reduce emails to everyone on subjects that may not be relevant for all Councillors.
5. Where the sender has chosen a group recipient (e.g., send to all Councillors), then replies should be for all who were copied in the original email. This helps with transparency, shared communication and limiting private side discussions and respects Councillors' views and wishes.
6. When forwarding on email, Councillors should consider if they need to remove email trails to respect privacy of individuals.
7. Parish Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct in all their work on behalf of the Parish Council.
8. Emails and other communications should be considered by Councillors and the Clerk as being in the public domain and as such, open to scrutiny.

Parish Council email addresses will be deleted once a Councillor resigns as a councillor for Blisworth Parish Council.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL – BUSINESS USE:

Communications from the Parish Council are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Parish Council does not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details
- If official council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk to the Parish Council as the Proper Officer.
- Keep them brief and to the point. Think about the words used to avoid misunderstandings.
- Always use a heading, and use separate emails for anything not related to that matter.
- When replying to 'group' emails, Councillors should remember to ensure complete transparency to 'reply to all' to ensure all Councillors have a full copy of any 'threads'.
- Delete unnecessary emails after use.
- Obtain the sender's permission before sharing data with third parties.
- Treat all documents as confidential until they are placed in the Public Domain.
- Review stored data on a regular basis and delete when no longer applicable or out of date.

Parish Council website:

Occasionally, the Parish Council may direct those contacting the Council to its website to see the required information, if it is in the public domain. The website can be found at <https://parish.blisworthvillage.org/>.

Parish Council email:

The Parish Council has a dedicated email address **blisworthparishcouncil@gmail.com**.

The email account is monitored and the Parish Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as practically possible.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk.

Ensure all parish council correspondence from the Clerk includes the Blisworth Parish Council footer containing the Privacy Statement:

Disclaimer: This email is from Blisworth Parish Council, but any views expressed are personal and may not reflect those of Blisworth Parish Council. The information contained herein, including any attachments, is confidential and may also be subject to legal privilege. It is intended for the addressee(s) only. Any unauthorised disclosure or copying of its contents is strictly prohibited

If you are not the intended recipient you must not disclose, distribute, copy, print or rely on any of the information contained in the email or attachments, and all copies must be deleted immediately. If you do receive this email in error, please notify the sender immediately and note that confidentiality or privilege is not waived or lost.

Blisworth Parish Council has scanned this email and attachments for viruses but does not accept any responsibilities for viruses once this email has been transmitted. You should therefore carry out your own anti-virus checks before opening any documents.

- Ensure that all devices (computers, laptops, phones) are password protected
- Take care when forwarding on emails or email threads that may contain personal data
- Delete emails which are no longer required
- Where possible direct all correspondence to the Clerk who can obtain the necessary consent
- Where possible avoid holding an individual's information in a Councillor's home or on a Councillor's own PC. If a Councillor has to hold any information containing personal data on behalf of the Parish Council, it needs to be stored securely in a locked room or cabinet or if on a PC, on a password protected device.
- Ensure that their antivirus software and operating system is up-to-date

- Inform the Parish Office of any breaches within 48 hours.

Emails to the Parish Council become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972 covers meetings and proceedings of local authorities. Previously, paragraph 4(2)(b) requires principal and parish councils to send summonses to attend meetings by post to their members' home addresses, or under 4(4), by post, to an alternative address specified. In practice, this covered all the papers to be considered at meetings, not just the agenda. The Government, under The Order made under Section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000 amended Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 to allow local authorities to send their members summonses to attend meetings, including agendas and related papers to meetings, electronically.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION AWARENESS:

Whilst parish councils are expected to comply with Data Protection legislation, individual Councillors will also need to ensure that they protect an individual's personal data whether it is stored electronically or as a hard copy. This applies only to living individuals (not the deceased, companies, other authorities and charities) Personal data includes:

- Names and addresses
- Telephone numbers
- Email addresses
- IP addresses

Councillors are required to implement the following agreed measures with regard to storing data either as a hard or electronic copy to comply with the legislation:

- Only use Blisworth Parish Council email account for parish council correspondence
- Only store personal information either as a digital copy or hard copy where necessary
- Delete old or out of date information
- Store personal information as a digital copy on a password protected device
- Digital data to be backed-up and shared using One Drive option where possible.

Version	Details of any revision	Approved at	Date	Review Date
v1	Adopted new BPC Electronic Communication Policy	Approved at BPC Meeting: 06/03/2023 Minute Point: 17	06/03/2023	May 2023
Readopted	None	Readopted at BPC Meeting 02/05/2023 Minute Point: 31	02/05/2023	May 2024