

COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

- ✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA
- ☎ **Telephone:** (01727) 825 314
- 💻 **Website:** <https://colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk>
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SOCIAL MEDIA AND NETWORKING POLICY

1. Introduction

Colney Heath Parish Council understands that using social media and networking sites is now a common practice and employees accessing and using sites in their own time is not normally a matter for Colney Heath Parish Council. However, there are situations where inappropriate use of social networking sites can harm the Parish Council, Councillors and/or employees and so the Parish Council may monitor social networking sites when considered appropriate and where such sites appear to be being used in such a way by employees that will affect the Parish Council image or relationships with other organisations and to prevent an employee or the Parish Council being implicated in potential legal action.

The lines between work and personal life can become blurred and in general, what an employee does in their own time is normally a personal decision but activities in or outside work may affect an employee's performance, the performance of others or Parish Council business interests or reputation. Employees may therefore not post on a blog or social networking site during their working time or at any other time using Parish Council equipment or property as the Parish Council's electronic communication systems are for business use only.

All rules regarding confidential business information apply in full to blogs and social networking sites and the transmission of confidential or proprietary information without the permission of the Parish Council is prohibited.

If an employee mentions the Parish Council in a blog or elsewhere in online social media at any time, or it is reasonably clear they are referring to the Parish Council's position or expresses a political opinion or an opinion regarding the Parish Council's positions, actions, or products, the employee must specifically disclose their relationship with the Parish Council and included a note that any opinion expressed is their personal opinion and not the Parish Council's position.

Any conduct which is not permissible under the law if expressed in any other form or forum is also not permissible if expressed through a social networking site e.g. posted material that is discriminatory, defamatory, libellous or malicious is forbidden.

2. Definitions

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For the purpose of this policy Colney Heath Parish Council regards social networking as a purely personal activity and defines “social networking sites” as meaning any such site and is not limited to the commonly known sites such as Facebook or Twitter.

3. Terms

Employees must, when using or posting material on social media and networking sites, specifically:-

- ensure that the material is not discriminatory, defamatory, libellous or malicious;
- not divulge, comment on or make subjective or offensive comments on individuals in the Parish Council;
- divulge any confidential information for other than professional reasons;
- not identify themselves as a representative of the Parish Council without the approval of the Clerk;
- if allowed to advertise the association with the Parish Council, must take on the responsibility for representing the Parish Council in a professional manner;
- ensure that any personal blogs contain disclaimers that make it clear that the opinions expressed are solely theirs and do not represent the views of the Parish Council;
- not make any recommendations or referrals for friends or associates;
- not reference any clients, customers, or partners without obtaining their express permission to do so;
- must be sure that they are aware of the Parish Council’s other policies that cover the dissemination of the Parish Council’s proprietary or confidential information, trade secrets and/or computer use;
- refer or discuss proprietary information on such sites for example the Parish Council’s financial information, intellectual property, information about customers, and so forth;
- not criticise the Parish Council or any employee of the Parish Council over specific issues;
- not use social networking or similar sites to make offensive, discriminatory or humiliating comments about specific employees or situations;
- ensure that the law in regard to copyright, plagiarism, libel and defamation of character is complied with;
- ensure that social networking activities do not interfere with their job responsibilities and only undertake social networking in their own time e.g. break and/or lunch times.

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4. Third Parties

If the Parish Council is the subject of adverse content on social networking sites from third parties (i.e. not an employee) but on investigation it is found that the third party is acting in consultation with or on behalf of an employee then enforcement action as detailed below will be taken.

5. Enforcement

If an employee says anything when using a social networking site that harms the reputation of the Parish Council or contravenes any of the above terms it will be considered to be serious or gross misconduct. If social networking sites are used to bully, harass or victimise one or more work colleagues then those who are the "victims" could take legal action (including possible police action) against the instigator (be this an employee or a third party) and the Parish Council may take disciplinary and/or legal action if we feel that the comments made were libel or slander or defamation about the Parish Council or our employee(s).

Such steps as may be appropriate to ensure that this Policy remains effective will be taken and the Parish Council Disciplinary Procedure used which in the case of serious breaches of the Policy may result in dismissal.

6. Review

This Policy will be reviewed periodically by the Council, as appropriate, to assess its effectiveness or as required by legislation and any appropriate changes will be made in consultation with employees.

This policy was adopted 27th February 2023 for a period of 2 years or until legislation changes.