

Bleadon Newsletter Working Group Notes
4th September 2023

Report Author: Cllr Jo Gower-Crane (Chair)

Present: Parish Councillors: Jo Gower-Crane (Chair), ID Clarke and Mary Sheppard
Members of the public: Les Masters and Gill Williams

1. Election of Chairman

Cllr Jo Gower-Crane was elected Chairman of the Working Group.

2. Apologies for absence

None.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Terms of Reference

Members considered draft Terms of Reference for the Working Group. It was noted that these were different to that previously considered by the Parish Council, but reflected the format agreed for the Open Spaces Working Group. It was further noted that the Working Group had no formal decision-making powers and that the Parish Clerk had been asked to attend the initial meeting purely to assist members in understanding their role and responsibilities. Some discussion took place regarding public participation and whether members of the public had the right to vote. It was explained that the general expectation was that the Chair of the Working Group would reflect the broad nature of debate, any consensus or recommendations reached, and report to the Parish Council. Votes would not normally be sought and individual comments would not normally be recorded.

5. Future of the Newsletter

It was noted that last year's newsletters cost £5K to produce. With £2K raised via advertising, the newsletter effectively cost the Parish Council £750 per edition. Aside from whether the current arrangements represented value for money, there was also a question as to whether it was appropriate for the Parish Council to have no expectations regarding editorial control for a publication it was funding.

A full and healthy debate took place regarding the relevance, reach and costs of the current Parish Newsletter. As a consequence of this debate, the following broad conclusions were reached:

- That a newsletter should continue to be produced on a broadly quarterly basis, but based upon the following principles:
- Re-branded as 'Parish News' rather than referencing a newsletter or magazine
- The need for a more structured approach to deadlines and editorial control
- Reflective of the Parish in its entirety
- Black and white printing
- A5 in size (easier to distribute and post through letterboxes)
- A focus on news and parish events, with limited use of photos and no crosswords/puzzles or articles relating to activities outside of the parish boundary.

As a consequence of the above, it was acknowledged that there could be an impact upon advertising income, but there was also potential to seek advertising from Bleadon based businesses which had not historically contributed to the 'Parish News'. The Parish Council would also need to establish a clear charging mechanism for advertising in future editions. Therefore, it was agreed that the next edition would not be seeking advertising, in order for residents and potential advertisers to see the new format first.

It was also considered that the move away from an A4 colour magazine format provided an opportunity to explore alternatives to current printing arrangements.

6. Editor for the next 'Parish News'

There was broad consensus that it was appropriate that the Parish Council should take a more 'hands on' approach to editing future editions. However, it was recognized that there was a need to guard against the risk of the focus becoming too narrow and that the Working Group could play a valuable role in this respect.

It was suggested that the Parish Clerk and the Chair of the Working Group working together might be able to produce an Autumn version of the 'Parish News' based upon the principles outlined in Section 5 above, with Cllr Gower-Crane nominated to be the Editor. It was noted that use of the Parish Clerk's time would have to be authorised by the Parish Council.

The Working Group felt that it would be useful for the first edition of the 'Parish News' to have an article about the role of the Parish Council and its powers and duties.

7. Distribution

It was noted that there has been a very good network of distributors who aim to distribute physical copies of the newsletter within 5 days of receipt. However, following public feedback a review and clarity of distribution mechanisms and agreements should be undertaken, to ensure all households within the parish are reached.

8. Recommendations

- That the Council adopt the revised Terms of Reference at Appendix 1.
- That the Council endorse the change in emphasis and physical form of future versions of the 'Parish News' as outlined in section 5.
- That the Council authorise Cllr Gower-Crane to be the Editor of the 'Parish News'.
- That the Council authorise a review and clarification of the 'Parish News' distribution mechanisms and agreements.
- That the Council authorise the Parish Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Working Group, to establish advertising rates for future editions, to be the subject of a report to Council.
- That the Personnel Committee discuss workload implications with the Parish Clerk.