

Consultation Policy & Procedures (Draft)

Introduction

Sunningdale Parish Council is committed to providing a high level of professional service to the community. The majority of the work of the Parish Council will be guided by the Business Plan 2021 - 2026 which took into account the views of the residents collated over a variety of interactions.

However, there may be circumstances when the nature of a project or an action has not been specifically envisaged when the Business Plan 2021 – 2026 was drawn up and the parish council wishes to seek the views of local people on the proposed project or action. In such circumstances, Sunningdale Parish Council may conduct a consultation, and this policy aims to set out how such consultations may take place.

A parish consultation will not be carried out in connection with any action required to be carried out by the Parish Council by law or where a project, action or activity is proposed on the grounds of health and/or safety or in connection with required repairs and maintenance, or in any circumstances where the proposed project, action or activity is outside the power of the parish council to undertake.

Policy

Sunningdale Parish Council is bound to a statutory consult only for the following 3 elements:

- Neighbourhood Plan
 - [Neighbourhood Planning \(Referendums\) Regulations 2012](#)
 - Community Government Review
 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/28/section/100>
 - [Strong and Prosperous Communities: \(the 2006 white paper\)](#)
 - Byelaws
 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2016/165/contents/made>
1. All consultations are conducted at the sole discretion of Sunningdale Parish Council or where it may be beneficial to consult with parishioners or experts in the parish to seek opinions.
 2. Sunningdale Parish Council will decide, at its sole discretion, who is to be consulted, provided that any consultation is limited to people living in the Parish or with experts with interests within the parish council area.
 3. Sunningdale Parish Council will decide how any consultation is to be conducted but will generally try to use a range of communication methods and media to reach the widest possible audience. Consultation methods that might be used may include, but not limited to:
 - 3.1 Face to face informal surveys
 - 3.2 Formal written questionnaires

- 3.3 Electronic Surveys
- 3.4 Telephone Surveys
- 3.5 Interviews
- 3.6 Open Days
- 3.7 Workshops
- 3.8 Surgery

- 4. Sunningdale Parish Council may use different survey methods for the same consultation where necessary to ensure equality of opportunity in responding. For example, the parish council may organise face to face consultations for those residents who do not have access to complete an online survey.
- 5. Wherever possible, surveys and questionnaires will include the following:
 - 5.1 A brief explanation of the nature of project/activity.
 - 5.2 A clear sign that the consultation is being undertaken by Sunningdale Parish Council
 - 5.3 A statement indicating that the results of the survey/questionnaire will be used to inform parish councillors who will remain responsible for making a decision on the matter.
 - 5.4 An opportunity for members of the public to add comments about the project/activity.
 - 5.5 If the survey is not online, a clear indication of when the questionnaire is to be returned and to which address must be given.
 - 5.6 A statement that those who do not respond will be deemed to have no objections to the project/activity proposed.
- 6. Wherever possible and/or appropriate, the parish council will ensure questionnaires or paper-based surveys will be hand delivered to make sure they reach all who are selected to respond.
- 7. Sunningdale Parish Council may choose whether to consult households or individuals depending upon the nature of the consultation but in the absence of any resolution to the contrary, a consultation relating to impact on a property will be deemed to be a household consultation and one response per household will be accepted.
- 8. Sunningdale Parish Council will ensure where a parish councillor has a declared prejudicial interest in a matter which is subject to a parish consultation, that the councillor should not be involved in any face-to-face telephone or interview surveys. Simple delivery of paper-based surveys/questionnaires is permitted.
- 9. Sunningdale Parish Council decisions can only be made by parish councillors in a duly convened meeting. The results of a parish consultation are not a substitute for proper discussion and resolutions of the parish council and must be used solely for the purpose of informing parish councillors of the general wishes of those the parish council consulted. Specifically, parish councillors are required to take the needs of the parish as a whole into account when making decisions and not just reflect the wishes of a minority, which may conflict with the needs of the parish as a whole. Therefore, the results of a parish consultation may not necessarily be reflected in the final decision of the parish council.
- 10. Sunningdale Parish Council will ensure feedback on the results of a survey will be made available to members of the public where appropriate, through the minutes of meetings at which the parish council discuss the results. It may provide a separate notification of the results to those surveyed if the council so choose, either through a separate notification or a notice on our the council website or noticeboards.

Procedure

When determining whether there is a need to conduct a consultation Sunningdale Parish Council will use the following criteria:

11. Why would the parish council consult on this?
12. Is it above a capital expenditure limit (>£75,000)?
13. Will it impact the precept in future years to maintain / operate?
14. Would the project be for the use of the residents, therefore their opinion on its usage and value would be informative?
15. Within the consultation, would it be reasonable to assume that the consultees would have the ability to provide a considered response?
16. When would the parish council consult, careful consideration needs to be given on the timing of a consultation?
17. Is it possible to provide adequate time to gain a realistic response?¹
18. What outcomes is the parish council looking to achieve?
19. Validity – is it possible to consult the correct audience, be it residents or professional bodies, to ensure that the responses received are expected to be logical and factually sound?

Below is an overview of the typical stages of a consultation and things Sunningdale Parish Council need to keep in mind when conducting a consultation:

20. **Sunningdale Parish Council should make sure the consultation is necessary.** Before commencing any consultation exercise, it is vital to make sure that it is necessary. Checks should be made with colleagues across the council that the information required is not already available or held elsewhere within the parish council. The council should make sure the activity is necessary and valuable and will help to reduce consultation fatigue and encourage residents to engage with the process.
21. **Sunningdale Parish Council should set clear objectives.** Clear objectives should be set regarding what the council are trying to achieve by carrying out a consultation. What does the council wish to find out and what information does it have which is already available?
22. **Sunningdale Parish Council should co-ordinate the exercise.** The council should work in a collaborative way within the council to avoid duplication and over-lapping activities. Approvals may need to be gained from senior management and relevant boards.
23. **Sunningdale Parish Council should allow sufficient time.** The council will ensure adequate time for consultees to respond is given (a minimum period of 4 weeks) and for consultees' views to be fully considered before the council take any actions or decisions made.
24. **Sunningdale Parish Council needs to document the costs.** The council needs to anticipate how much a consultation will cost, how much capacity is required, as well as the resources needed to implement any changes following the outcomes of the consultation.
25. **Sunningdale Parish Council should select and recruit participants.** The council should identify the people or groups who are likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, the focus of the consultation. It will need to let consultees know what the consultation is about, what the council is asking of them and the potential outcomes.

¹ See Section 3 - 3.1 – 3.8 and 23.

26. **Sunningdale Parish Council needs to select an appropriate method.** The council needs to choose the most appropriate way to consult depending on the type of questions it wants answered – and the subject matter at hand.
27. **Sunningdale Parish Council needs to promote the exercise.** The council should request support from the councillors to increase the awareness of the consultation. Details of the consultation should be posted several weeks prior to it commencing, as well as during the consultation. It is important the council has a marketing plan, to ensure the consultation can be promoted in an organised fashion with timelines, actions such as banners, leaflets, leaflet drops, online promotions, to make the consultation a success.
28. **Sunningdale Parish Council should gather and input data.** The council should record the views of the consultees in a transparent and accessible way. This may be easier for text-based methods such as surveys, than face-to-face methods, for instance.
29. **Sunningdale Parish Council should monitor the responses.** The council shall keep a track of the number of responses received so it can take action to improve response rates if necessary. It also should check the responses being submitted to get an indication of the issues arising.
30. **Sunningdale Parish Council should analyse the results.** The council needs to consider what story the data is telling us and what this means in terms of the questions asked. The council needs to calculate how many people gave certain answers and look for variations. It should also seek to identify any patterns, trends or themes to help identify key issues.
31. **Sunningdale Parish Council should determine its outcomes.** The council should decide what is going to happen because of the consultation and the reasons why. It needs to explain how consultees' contributions have informed the decision-making process.
32. **Sunningdale Parish Council should provide feedback to relevant parties.** The council shall ensure that the results and subsequent actions are communicated to participants and other relevant parties.
33. **Sunningdale Parish Council needs to evaluate the consultation.** The council needs to consider if the consultation has achieved its objectives. How have the consultees' views changed because of the consultation? What lessons can the council learn?