**Wheathill Parish Council – Social Media Policy**

**1. Purpose** This policy outlines the expectations for all Councillors, the Clerk, and contracted personnel (e.g. the Lengthsman) regarding the use of social media, both in an official and personal capacity where it may impact the Parish Council’s reputation or activities.

**2. Scope** This policy applies to all members of the Parish Council (elected or co-opted), the Clerk, and any individuals contracted by the Council.

**3. Platforms Covered** Social media includes, but is not limited to:

* Facebook (pages and groups)
* WhatsApp (group chats related to council business)
* Instagram
* X (formerly Twitter)
* Threads
* YouTube
* Any blog, forum, or website where council matters are discussed publicly

**4. Official Council Accounts** The Council currently operates a Facebook Page. This is administered primarily by the Chairman, with contributions from the Clerk and Councillors where appropriate. All posts made on behalf of the Council must:

* Be factual, respectful, and non-political
* Clearly relate to council activities or public service announcements
* Avoid personal opinions or speculation, particularly on sensitive topics such as planning

**5. Who Can Post** Any member of the Council (including the Clerk) may post on the Council’s social media channels, provided they adhere to this policy. Posts may be delegated according to topic expertise (e.g. 1 Cllr for farming-related updates, another Cllr for planning matters, Clerk for agendas and minutes etc.).

**6. Personal Social Media Use** Council members are expected to:

* Avoid making disparaging, defamatory, or politically biased statements about the Council, its partners, or residents
* Not present personal opinions as the official stance of the Council
* Never engage in debate or comment on live planning applications or sensitive council issues in Facebook comments or other public forums
* Avoid identifying themselves as acting on behalf of the Council unless clearly authorised to do so

**7. Conduct and Responsibilities** When using social media, Councillors and staff must:

* Be respectful in all communication
* Consider tone, especially in response to criticism or misinformation
* Report any posts or comments that are defamatory, threatening, or otherwise inappropriate to the Clerk or Chairman
* Never share confidential or exempt information

**8. Monitoring and Privacy** The Council does not actively monitor personal social media use, nor does it impose restrictions on personal devices. However, where a Councillor's or staff member's public social media activity brings the Council into disrepute, this may be subject to review under the Council’s disciplinary or Code of Conduct procedures.

**9. Media Enquiries and Press Contact** In the event of contact from the media or social media outlets seeking comment on Council business, Councillors and staff should refer the enquiry to the Clerk or Chairman. No unauthorised statements should be issued.

**10. Breach of Policy** Any breach of this policy will be considered under the Council’s existing Disciplinary Policy (for staff) or the Code of Conduct (for Councillors). Serious breaches may lead to formal investigation.

**11. Policy Review** This policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier if there is a significant change in social media use, legislation, or council structure.

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