



Date: 19 September 2016

Title: Communications Update

Purpose of the Report: To update Members in respect of Town Council Communications.

Contact Officer: Louise Hall, Senior Administration Officer

Corporate Objective/s	Leighton-Linslade Town Council Three Year Plan: Objective 15: to expand and consolidate opportunities for two-way dialogue with residents and ensure greater community engagement in, and awareness of, Town Council activity.	
Implications:		
Human Resources	X	None
Operational/Service delivery	X	None
Procedural/Legal	X	None
Financial	X	None

1. RECOMMENDATION/S

Should members be minded, the proposals are:

1.1 To note the report.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 As a publicly funded body, Leighton-Linslade Town Council has a duty to actively engage with the local community, providing information regarding its activities and proposed future projects, seeking feedback from residents and raising awareness of the Council and its remit within the Parish.

2.2 Historically, community engagement has taken place through a variety of forums including a printed newsletter, public consultation exercises, a website and community events.

2.3 More recently, following the rapid developments in technology and the advent of the Localism Agenda and e-Government, the Town Council has

moved further towards electronic media, communicating with residents through channels including Facebook, Twitter, Mailchimp and YouTube.

- 2.4 Advice from sector bodies including the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) advocates the use of new technologies to reach out to a greater number of people and to potentially engage with residents who might not otherwise be aware of or involved with parish council activity.
- 2.5 Within the Town Council's Three Year Plan for 2015-2018, adopted by Council in early 2015, objective 15 states: "to expand and consolidate opportunities for two-way dialogue with residents and ensure greater community engagement in, and awareness of, Town Council activity".
- 2.6 Activity to date has included the rebranding and relaunch of the Town Council's parish newsletter, the development of a new website, the production of promotional videos which are available via the website and via the Town Council's YouTube channel and the active use of a number of Facebook pages, alongside a Twitter newsfeed.

3. UPDATE

- 3.1 **Website:** this continues to be developed and refreshed, with new photos, images and text added on a regular basis. Since the last report in February 2016, the number of visits to the website has risen from 45,870 to 47,623. The statistics demonstrate an increase in visits to the website at the time of the Big Lunch, the Canal Festival and the opening of the Splash & Play facility.
- 3.2 **Branding:** Logos relating to the Council's programme of events have now been developed and are being used across Town Council social media, website and publications. This includes advertising banners on the scrolling images section on the homepage of the website and on staff email signatures – a very effective method of promoting activity.

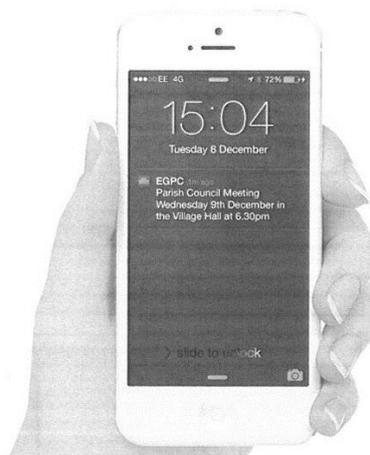




- 3.3 **Town Council App:** A Leighton-Linslade Town Council App is in the early stages of development. The purpose of the Parish App will be to provide key information in a mobile friendly, easy to use format, including being able to send our subscribers 'Push Notifications' (instant alerts). This would be a great way of letting people know what committees are discussing and raising awareness that the public can attend meetings.

It is anticipated that the App will be completed within this financial year and a demonstration to Committee will follow at a later date.

Push Notifications – Ideal for sending instant alerts about almost anything.



- 3.4 **Newsletter** - The About Town Newsletter database on Mailchimp continues to grow, from 247 to 408 subscribers in the last 6 months. We have set up a Survey Monkey account and have started using our email databases to contact people for feedback.
- 3.5 We have recently completed a survey regarding 'About Town' based on the subscriber list. The survey was sent out by email using Survey Monkey and responses received the same way. This is a quick and effective way for us to interact with our readers and gain valuable feedback about our projects and events (see survey results at **Appendix A**).



- 3.6 **Social Media:** This continues to be a highly effective way of engaging with the community, with increased engagement across our platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter. An excellent example of this is the below Facebook post, announcing that the Splash & Play was open for the Summer season.

This post alone reached **12,083 people** with **149 shares**, **209 likes** and **46 comments**.

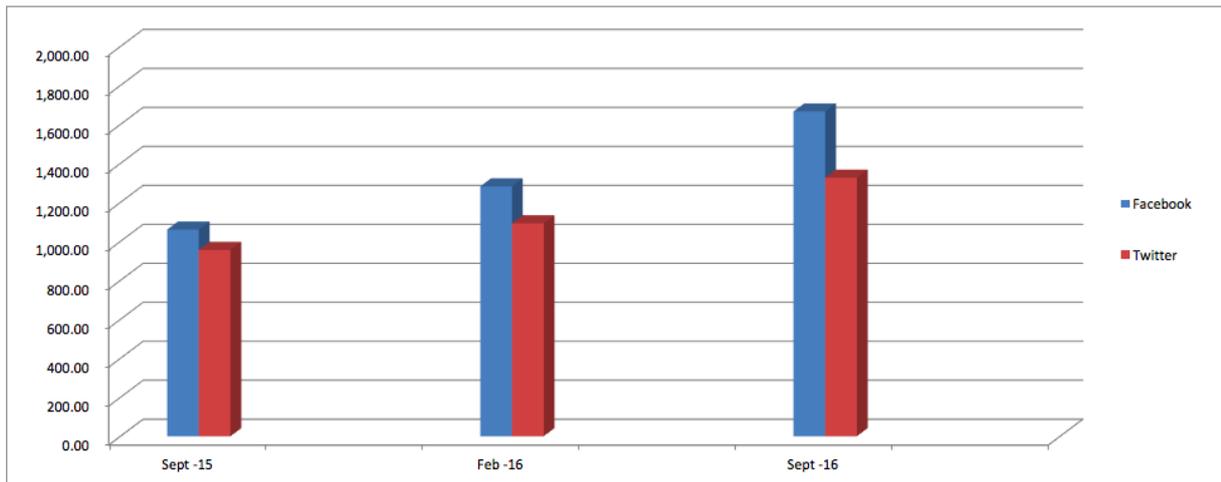


- 3.7 Following on from the success of the above post, we have taken control of a Splash Park Facebook 'page'. This page has 4.7 stars out of 5 and 4,205 page likes. This will be an ideal platform for sharing information from our other pages, such as the Children's Trail and event information via the Leighton-Linlslade Town Council Official page.
- 3.8 We have found that the use of Facebook "events" has been extremely successful, both at increasing engagement and monitoring success. The Linlslade Canal Festival "event" on Facebook reached 20,000 people.
- 3.9 At the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 22nd February 2016 it was reported that the number of followers had reached:

- 1282 for Facebook, and
- 1092 for Twitter.

More recently, these figures have increased again:

- 1666 for Facebook (29.95% increase)
- 1326 on Twitter (21.43% increase)



	<u>Sept -15</u>	<u>Feb -16</u>	<u>Sept -16</u>
Facebook	1,060.00	1,282.00	1,666.00
Twitter	956.00	1,092.00	1,326.00

	<u>Sept 15 - Feb 16</u>	<u>Feb 16 - Sept 16</u>	<u>Sept 15 - Sept 16</u>
Facebook	20.94%	29.95%	57.17%
Twitter	14.23%	21.43%	38.70%

3.10 We have been proactive with the 'Facebook page' likes increases. When people like our 'Facebook posts' you can see whether they also like our 'Facebook page' - if they don't, we can invite them to do so. These results are fantastic, showing a year's growth of nearly 60% for Facebook and nearly 40% for Twitter. Social media is proving to be our most powerful communication tool.

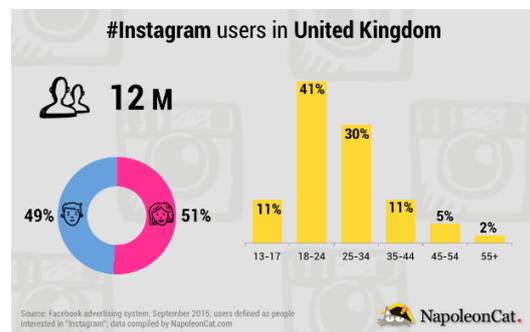
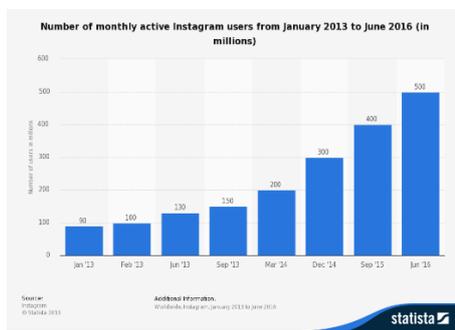
4. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

4.1 **Website:** The Town Council has appointed a consultant to undertake a critical review of the website. This will include a review of the layout, style, functionality and ease of use and will help inform future developments to the site. Further consideration will also be given to ways in which to extend our reach, for example Google AdWords, search engine optimization and Rich Site Summary (see explanation at **Appendix B**).

4.2 **Astral Park:** the “add-on” website for Astral Park is under development and will provide key information for those searching online for a facility to host their activity, event, meeting or function.

4.3 **Social Media:** the option of sponsored/paid for social media posts to extend our reach to target desired audiences will be given further consideration.

In addition, we have identified the potential to create an Instagram account. Instagram is the number one fastest-growing social media network with 500 million users. It could also be a very effective method to communicate with a younger audience, as 41% of its users are aged 18-24 and 30% of its users are aged 25-34.



4.4 **About Town:** a number of actions have been identified as a result of the recent reader e-survey and are in the process of being implemented (see “Outcomes” in Appendix A).

4.5 **Resources:** All service areas have a responsibility to communicate news and activities and to participate in the promotion of Town Council events and initiatives. A number of staff members are actively involved in updating the website and social media channels on a regular basis. In addition, a monthly communications meeting is held, to help inform the advance scheduling of posts and messages. Primary responsibility for the communications channels (other than About Town) rests with the Senior Administration Officer.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 It is clear that electronic communication is welcomed by our community given the year-on-year increases in numbers using the various applications. Whilst this is positive news, the on-going commitment to the digital age has resource implications both in terms of staffing, their training as well as the investment in the necessary applications and associated infrastructure to ensure we remain at the “leading edge” of technology. More detailed reports will be presented to the Policy and Finance Committee for its consideration at its meeting to be held 21st November 2016.