



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

# **Social Media Guidelines for Neighbourhood Planning**

**A toolkit for neighbourhood planners**



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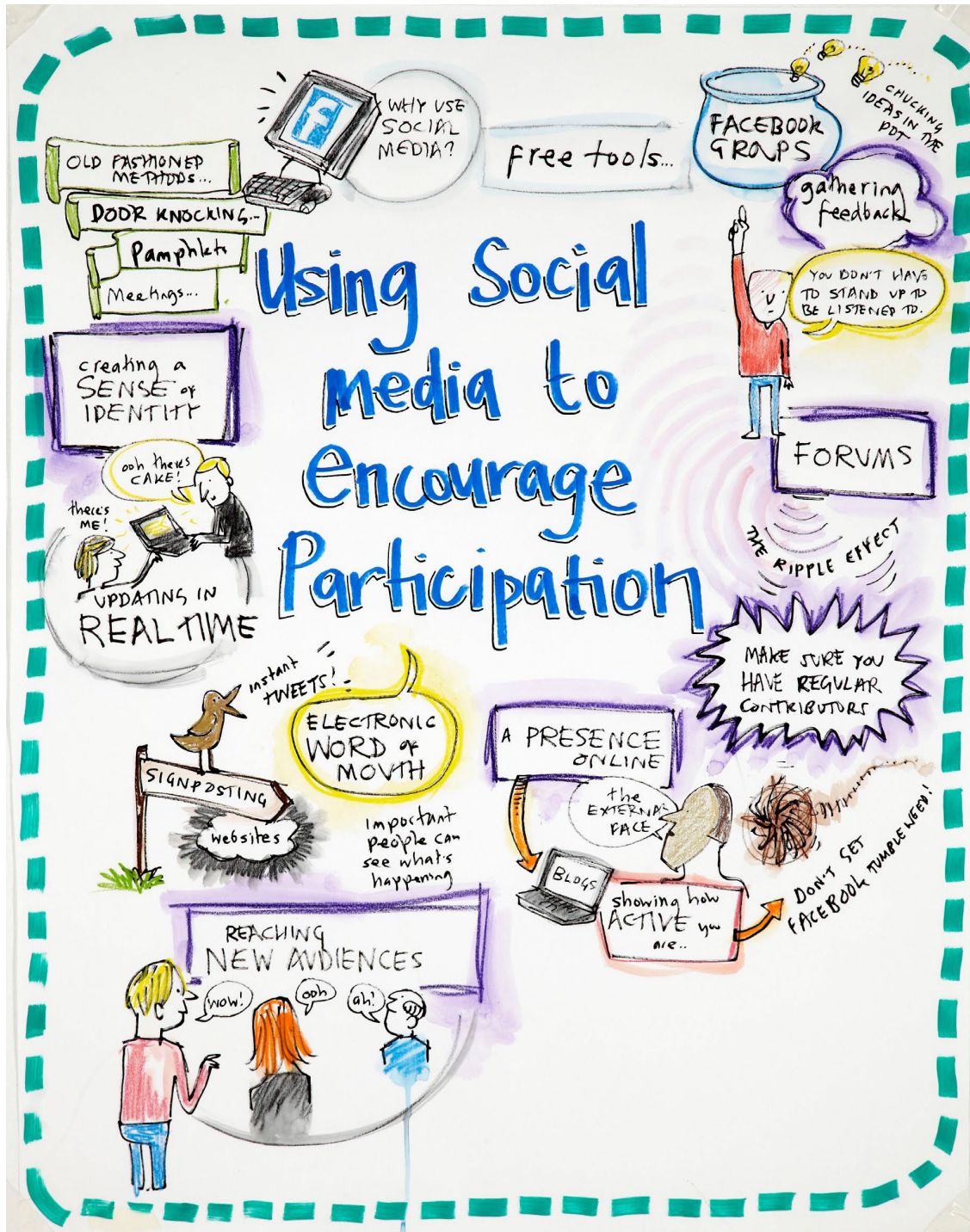
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## What's the point of social media?

- To engage and have conversations with people, in real time.
- To share ideas and start discussions and debates.
- To learn stuff from others, getting as well as giving help.
- To encourage people to read/do/take about stuff key to your mission.
- To show that your group/campaign is alive and busy and people are talking about you.



## A few Golden Rules

### 1. Be yourself

Readers can see through marketing speak. Let people see you as a person, not a mouthpiece, even when your organisation grows bigger.

### 2. Keep it up to date

There's nothing worse than a Facebook or Twitter feed with tumbleweed. But do check out our optimum posting frequencies in the relevant sections below.

### 3. Add value

Make sure your content is sharing tips, tricks insights and ideas. People are busy and they need to know that you're worth listening to.

### 4. Be external

Don't just talk about yourself and your organisation, but comment on other blogs, videos and news articles, just like a friend would recommend things to you.

### 5. Listen to others

Keep an eye on social media to learn what others think of your brand. You might find some ways to improve your work as well.

### 6. Stay timely.

People like social media because the conversation takes place in real time. Take time to refresh content, respond to questions and update information.

### 7. Take responsibility

While social media is less formal than statements to the media, when creating posts, Facebook posts or blogs, don't contain any content on there that you wouldn't share with the media. Information spreads quickly via social media.

### 8. Look out

Don't forget to look at others and see what they're doing. Think before you post about what your friend/mum/neighbour would think. Is it interesting?

## Making the most of Twitter

### 1. Offer something useful

Posts don't necessarily need to be fully formed news stories, as on newsletters and blogs, posts can be fun or provocative, including quotes and stats that are surprising, but people are busy, so where possible include a link to related content or a call to action. People will follow you because they think you're worth listening to.

### 2. Keep it real time

Most people access Twitter through mobile devices or desktop applications such as TweetDeck. So, make the most of posting about something that's happening right now, when appropriate.

In some cases, it can be appropriate to schedule posts ahead of time (eg via Hootsuite). On the downside, if people respond to it and there is nobody there to respond, it may appear disingenuous.

### **3. Post often**

Unlike Facebook profiles or email inboxes, people don't tend to think of their Twitter feeds as getting filled up with unwanted content, it's viewed as a constant stream that can be dipped in and out of when they feel like it. Spread your posts out over the day but obviously reply to questions and comments as soon as possible.

### **4. Post video and photo content**

Share other media that immediately brings your activities to life.

### **5. Build a following**

Follow people on Twitter, they might even follow you back. Find other Twitter account holders who are interested in the stuff you care about and follow people they follow (eg. similar organisations, active bloggers, fanatical posters).

### **6. Don't go one way**

Reply to people, ask questions and use it to build new relationships – and maintain them. Giving help and contributing to debates helps build your reputation as a leader online and grows your audience.

### **7. Repost others' content**

Add your voice to the debate by reposting others. There are two ways to retweet:

- Wholesale retweets via Twitter or an account holder's website (includes no contextualisation from you, but simply spreads the word).
- Contextualised retweet, via TweetDeck, with some additional content from you (e.g. Looks great RT @landshare: new gardening app for communities to share land).

Don't retweet so much that this outweighs original content about your own activities/thoughts.

### **8. Stay Connected**

To stay on top of what others are saying about you/what others are saying about issues you care about, sign up for a free application such as TweetDeck or Hootsuite to keep abreast of the action.

### **9. Use hashtags**

These are keywords that associate your tweets with a particular event, movement, current trend or issue by adding # in front of a word. For example, at events Twitter users will often agree a common tag to identify themselves to each other. That

enables participants, and also people at home who are interested but couldn't attend, to converse around the issues.

Tagging tweets using # means you're joining a conversation and adding a voice to an issue. It also enables issues to 'trend' on the Twitter.com homepage. Find an already existent hashtag that is relevant for you (try <http://www.hashtags.org/> to see a list and how people are using them in their tweets). For example, #neighbourhoodplanning. Or you could start your own, as we did with #planinngcamp (some hashtags really take off, others don't get reused by others, so stick to just a few key ones). But don't use too many hashtags, because your tweets start to look spammy.

### **10. Keep it brief**

Tweets must be less than 140 characters<sup>1</sup> to be posted. Use a URL shortener such as [http:// goo.gl/](http://goo.gl/) to reduce the length of your links, so they look like this sort of thing: [goo.gl/I0NWC](http://goo.gl/I0NWC) Some Twitter sending services (eg TweetDeck) have an option to shorten your URLs directly for you as you paste them in. By keeping tweets down to 132 characters others will be able to more easily retweet your entire tweet without editing it (this allows space at the beginning of their retweet for "RT @edenproject:").

### **11. Seed your stories via Twitter**

Similar to emailing a press release, get your tweet read by relevant people (and retweeted by well-connected people) by sharing a tweet with them, using the @ device at the very beginning of the tweet. (eg @TCPA Check out our new Neighbourhood Plan for Hoylake: [goo.gl/I0NWC](http://goo.gl/I0NWC) ) It's like saying 'hey, TCPA, have you seen this?'

This tweet will be seen by anyone managing that twitter account, and whoever follows you both. The hope is that they retweet this directly on to all their followers.



## 12. Talk to and about people

When you put @someone within your tweet, but not at the start, it is shared with all your followers and @someone. It's just a regular tweet, delivered to all your followers. Private messages can be sent to someone who is following you, beginning with the letters DM at the start of the message. If you want to DM someone not following you, ask them politely to follow you. Only do this for a particular purpose and make clear what that is (eg: @hoylake I've got a question about interactive maps for you. Pls follow so I can DM).

## 13. Practice with a personal account

Set up your own Twitter account where you can test out re-tweeting / hashtags etc with less pressure than on the live neighbourhood plan account. Try and follow people to learn from, who are active and successful on Twitter (e.g. well-known celeb tweeters, or other organisations similar to yours whose Twitter feed you find interesting).

## Trouble shooting on Twitter

### Sending something accidentally

If you accidentally send a tweet that you didn't mean to, consider deleting it if you discover this immediately. Bear in mind that once picked up by an application such as TweetDeck or retweeted by others, your tweet cannot be permanently deleted from the ether. Unless you get in there very quickly, it may be best to be human about it and simply correct your mistake in a subsequent tweet.



**edenproject** Eden Project

30 Sep

Oops, finger slipped. Overexcited about new ethically-sourced musical instruments! Make some noise: [bit.ly/nhcjqw](http://bit.ly/nhcjqw)



**edenproject** Eden Project

☆ ↻ 🗑️ - More

Affordable, ethically sourced <http://bit.ly/nhcjqw>



**edenproject** Eden Project

30 Sep

Gardening tips for the month of October - watch our new video!  
[bit.ly/p1BHho](http://bit.ly/p1BHho)

## Ideal content for neighbourhood planning tweets:

### Live action

- Tweeting live (including photos and video if you'd like) from your meeting and launches in real time – if genuinely interesting.
- (eg. We're at Teignmouth village hall today – pop along between 10 and 4)
- Tweeting live from a conference one of your team is talking at or attending (eg Loving the jargon-busting session here at #planningcamp).
- Alerting residents to the fact that your story is on the radio right now / quote what the speaker said (eg. John Humphries on @BBCR4 right now talking about Hoylake Village life!).

### Community news

- Sharing news snippets about good news in the field, such as new funding sources other neighbourhood planning people might want to apply for / news from the government on new planning rights (eg Village SOS competition just launched today – any #neighbourhoodplanning guys entering?)
- Use Google Alerts to keep track of things you're interested in and then share stuff.
- If it is not sensitive info you could tweet that you've just met up with @designcouncil to work on stuff together. It's a way of announcing to all your and their followers your connection and also reminding @designcouncil that the meeting was important to you and looking forward to working together! (e.g. Just met with @designcouncil – excited about @hoylake working together).

### Resident announcements

- Publicising your events (eg. conference / roadshow) coming up. (eg. Pop into #Leeds Civic Square if you're around today – for free buns and badges!)
- Share relevant news from your partners / key supporters / Friends, always including why it's interesting for your followers (eg. Great news that @queenspark been made first community council in UK).
- Alerting people to new content on your website (eg. Survey open for all local residents).

Have your say at [goo.gl/I0NWC](http://goo.gl/I0NWC)) (eg. New photos from yesterday's launch at [goo.gl/I0NWC](http://goo.gl/I0NWC)).

## Answering and asking questions

Ask people if they have any top tips for getting running community consultations (then make the best into a 'top 10 tips on how to run a community consultation' on your blog).

## Making the most of Facebook

### 1. Share interesting stories and photos

You can use Facebook to point people to blog content, using links, but often people like direct content they can view from within Facebook itself. You may need to sum up blog stories or post photos and videos straight on to Facebook.

### 2. Ask questions

Engage in a proper conversation by encouraging suggestions and comments from fans. This could take the form of a question in your status update (eg. What's top of your list for making our town better than it already is?, as Hoylake Village Life has).

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for 'Hoylake Village Life' with 141 likes. The post asks, 'What is top of your list for making Hoylake better than it already is?'. The post has several comments from users like Tes Roberts, Linda Kelly, and others, suggesting things like a cafe, a pub, better walkways, health and fitness promotion, changing the weather, rollerblading, a cinema, a swimming pool, a prominent hotel, and an indoor play centre for kids.

141 talking about this

See all

Wirral TV

BHS Wirral

Wirral Autistic Soc

The Picture House

Hillbark Hotel, Wir

Create a Page

Add to my page's favourites

Remove from my page's favourites

Get updates via RSS

Report Page

Share

**Hoylake Village Life**

What is top of your list for making Hoylake better than it already is?

Like · Comment · Share · Friday at 22:44 · 🌐

**Tes Roberts** A cafe on the prom!  
Friday at 22:51 · Like · 🇺🇸 2

**Linda Kelly** and a pub !!  
Friday at 22:52 · Like · 🇺🇸 1

**Linda Kelly** kelly said a much better walk way.....  
Friday at 22:56 · Like

**Hoylake Village Life** @Move\_Health says "more to promote health and fitness in the area" (via our @HoylakeVillage Twitter account.  
Friday at 22:59 · Like

**ColinReid Stewart** Ummmm, change the weather? ;-)  
Yesterday at 08:46 · Like

**Justine Aldersey-Williams** A smooth prom that you can rollerblade on and a very big windbreak!  
Yesterday at 09:03 · Like

**Jenni Bakewell Lloyd** What about a cinema, swimming pool, beautiful prominent hotel on the main street.....wait a minute...didn't we have all those things once???  
Yesterday at 10:54 · Like · 🇺🇸 1

**Julian Priest** YuP . . . Hoylake actually had TWO cinemas at one time  
Yesterday at 11:04 · Like

**Regan Shaw** For cinema, I like the HVL cinema nights. How about an indoor play centre for kids? When the weather is crap, there's nowhere to take the kiddies to burn off energy.  
Yesterday at 11:48 · Like · 🇺🇸 1

**Julie Lomax** Getting the cafe on the prom up and running!

Or it could be a Facebook Poll, with multiple choice answers, such as this one from the Eden Project.



**Eden Project** asked: We've chosen our favourite three photos for our new profile picture - please vote for your fave!

- Cornelia Andersen's bee** ...
- Halys Anna Hickman's sea holly** ...
- Baukje Vrieswijk's wooden sculpture** ...

16,928 Impressions · 0% feedback

 Ask friends ·  1 · 25 August at 08:52

### 3. Don't overload your fans

Unlike Twitter, it's best not to post more than twice a day, because your status updates fill up people's newsfeeds, alongside stuff from their friends etc.

### 4. Update your profile photo

Just like a real person, update your profile photo often, reflecting the season or your latest brand refresh. Eden invites fans to upload photos of the site which we then choose from, which increases photo uploads and conversations about us.

### 5. Mention others

Similar to Twitter mentions, include links to other Facebook walls (eg. Really chuffed to see @hoylake interactive map launch today).

## Troubleshooting on Facebook

### 1. Spam content on your page

Feel free to delete posts on your page which are obvious advertising and are not contributing to the conversation. The author will not be alerted to this action. But you may want to show some lenience for posts which may be slightly related and need the help of your audience for something charitable (for example Eden didn't delete a poster that was uploaded about a lost cat in the area very local to us).

If someone is especially persistent, send them a message and ask if there's anything you could do together.

### 2. Dealing with queries / complaints Be prompt

Facebook users expect a quick response to their enquiries and comments. Even if you don't yet know the full answer to a query, let them know that you are following it up.

### Don't pick fights

In all cases, keep your cool and discuss your approach with other members of your forum.

## To answer or not to answer?

Consider whether a provocative comment actually needs an answer or someone is simply venting steam. Sometimes it can be best to ignore a comment rather than acknowledging it with a response.

You may also find that others come to your defence in a way that is more authentic, and less confrontational, than you defending your organisation yourself.



**Eden Project**  
Calling all guerrilla gardeners! Get your hands on our new seed bombs and grenades and start transforming verges, roadsides and forgotten areas into an urban jungle.

**Cause a stir with our guerrilla gardening kit**  
[www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com)

28,021 Impressions · 0.30% feedback  
Like · Comment · Share · 04 August at 13:26 · 🌐

👍 68 people like this.

**Fay McIntyre** I want :)  
04 August at 13:29 · Like

**Joanne Haslam** what?!!!! That ain't right... they don't have to be shaped like hand grenades do they? Who's brilliant idea was that?  
04 August at 13:32 · Like · 🗨️ 3 people

**Charlotte Rogers** Agree with the general idea, but not that shape of them. Come on, you are bound to get some joker painting them black and using them to threaten someone! I can hear the laughter now, but just take a minute to think about it...there are THOSE sort of clowns in the world!!!  
04 August at 13:39 · Like · 🗨️ 1 person

**Joanne Haslam** You do realise the Daily Mail will be nailing this product to the mast by morning... "Eco Warriors Incite Rebel Rage with Bomb Product."  
04 August at 13:40 · Like · 🗨️ 1 person

**Kay Emmerson** I think its just for fun Joanne! :P  
04 August at 13:40 · Like · 🗨️ 1 person

**Charlotte Rogers** Agree that is just for fun, and such a fab idea, but I also have to agree that the papers will have a 'Field' day with it!  
04 August at 13:43 · Like · 🗨️ 1 person

**Gemma Stafford** Love it! And of course it's just for fun, so far this summer holiday i have seen COUNTLESS numbers of little kids running around with pretend guns and grenades, maybe people need to be a bit more worried about that then some harmless gardening item lol :)  
04 August at 13:54 · Like

## Move the conversation on

While it's really important not to ignore things, you may find that as well as dealing with the problematic post, you can also post some new content, which will start to move a post down the page, reducing visibility.

## Ideal neighbourhood planning Facebook content

- Create an event invite to forthcoming meetings (like you would your own birthday party).

- Share / like your partners' content, but always include a relevant hook for why your fans will find this useful.
- Solicit viewpoints from locals
- Create a photo album of recent activity.

## **Making the most of the blog**

Get you and other forum members set up on a free wordpress site

### **1. Post frequently**

Regular posts are a good idea – share the task with other forum members or invite members of the public to do a guest blog. That way people can feel ownership rather than think the forum is a one-way process. Carriageworks group is a good example of a lot of activity on a blog

### **2. Use quality images**

Break up text with relevant images –it's also really important to help people identify with where they live.

### **3. Promote your blog stories**

Use social media, particularly Twitter, to direct people to your stories, including links to them.

### **4. Include video content**

Embed videos on blogs through the html view of the edit screen (pasting in the video's embed code, taken from Youtube).

## **Making the most of Youtube**

### **1. Include your website**

If possible include your website URL and logo on the actual video itself. Or if you cannot amend the video, at least begin the video description with your website's full url (including http://).

### **2. Tag videos on Youtube**

Use appropriate tags, separated by spaces, double words inside apostrophes, which will help display your video as suggested videos to viewers on Youtube.



This video is public.



628 views ?

Uploaded by edenprojecttv on 12 Oct 2011

<http://www.edenproject.com> celebrates the 1,700 runners of our 2011 Marathon and Half Marathon, including Radio 1 DJ Scott Mills.

2 likes, 0 dislikes

As Seen On:

[The Eden Project Blog](#)

Category:

Sport

Tags:

[marathon](#) [eden marathon](#) [Eden Project](#) [sport](#) [sports](#) [cornwall](#) [eden project tv](#)  
[Sport](#) [scott mills](#)

### 3. Share videos via social media

Shout about new video content on your channel via Facebook, Twitter and the blog. As well as embedding the video on your blog, you should include a text link to it on Youtube.