



NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Members' Social Media Policy

JULY 2023

Responsibility:	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Approved by:	Full Authority
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement. Social media helps the Authority in fostering closer relationships with residents, visitors, partners, stakeholders and the media.
- 1.2 The objective of this policy is to provide guidance to Members on the acceptable use of public social media. It is intended to minimise the risk of social media activity that impacts negatively on the reputation of the Authority or the role of Authority Members. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 1.3 The provisions of this policy apply at all times where any views expressed can be linked to your role as a Member or by direct connection with the Authority. This includes the use of social networking sites in Members' own time and from Members' own computers and other devices, where that is or might appear to be part of a Member's public role. The Authority's reputation for impartiality and objectivity is crucial. The public must be able to trust the integrity of the Authority and Members must not act online in a way that brings or may be perceived to bring the Authority or the role of Authority Member into disrepute. Disclaimers are often useful when publishing information, however they also need to be carefully considered, scoped and phrased.

2. Policy Principles

- 2.1 These principles set out the standards of behaviour expected of Members when using public social media.
 - **Be professional:** Members, together with officers, are ambassadors for the organisation. Always make it clear whether you are acting in your public capacity as an Authority Member or in your private / personal capacity, in accordance with the guidelines in this policy. Do not attack or abuse others or post derogatory or offensive material.
 - **Be responsible:** be honest at all times, do not share information which may be inaccurate or is unverified, and always be transparent when altering or reposting third party material.
 - **Be credible:** be fair and thorough and make sure you are doing the right thing.
- 2.2 Failure to abide by the rules and procedures written in this policy will be classed as a breach of this policy. Potential breaches of this policy will be considered in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

- 2.3 All social media accounts and pages for the Authority directly, i.e. anything identifying itself as a corporate account or messaging, must be approved by the Authority's Communications Manager prior to creation / publication. Members must not create content that appears to be part of the Authority's formal social media output.
- 2.4 Always remember that participation online can result in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media.
- 2.5 Members must not publish potential media stories relating to the Authority whether on personal or on NPA social media accounts until they have been promoted on the Authority's main account, i.e. tweeting Ministers' visits in advance of the Authority's media coverage. If in doubt as to whether a particular matter has already become public, Members must consult with the Communications Manager.
- 2.6 Never give out personal details such as home addresses and phone numbers. Never post the personal data (which includes photographs) of third parties without first obtaining their permission.
- 2.7 Please be aware that you may attract media interest in you as an individual, so proceed with care whether you are participating in a business or a personal capacity. If you have any doubts, seek advice first.
- 2.8 Stay within the legal framework and be aware that defamation, confidentiality, copyright and data protection laws apply.
- 2.9 Members are accountable, and should not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of the Authority.
- 2.10 Members are asked to report any defamatory posts or other defamatory social media activity to the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

3. General Guidelines

- 3.1 The growing popularity of social media has opened up new opportunities for communication. Social media provides opportunities, but there are some pitfalls. The following guidelines are there to provide you with information to make responsible decisions and to get the best out of the tools available.
- 3.2 Whether or not you choose to create or participate in social media channels or any other form of online publishing or discussion is your own decision. However, online collaboration platforms are fundamentally changing the way we work and engage with customers and our partners.
- 3.3 Any information published online can be accessed around the world within seconds and will be publicly available for all to see, even if subsequently deleted.

3.4 You **must** take the following into consideration when using social media:

- Be aware of your association with the Authority in online spaces. If you identify yourself as an Authority Member, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and third parties and complies with the Code of Conduct.
- Identify yourself, your name and your membership of the Authority when you discuss the National Park or Authority-related matters, and write in the first person. You must make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the Authority.
- Members are personally responsible for the content that you publish on blogs, wikis, social platforms, or any other form of social media. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time.
- Respect copyright, fair use, confidentiality, defamation, data protection and financial disclosure laws.
- Don't cite or reference other Members, employees, partners, or contractual third parties without their prior approval, for example attributing a particular point of view to them. When you do make such a reference, where possible link back to the original source.
- Respect your audience. Don't use offensive or discriminatory language, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. You should also show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. Do not do anything that could cause the Authority to appear to breach equality legislation.
- Avoid confrontation and unnecessary disputes, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so.
- If reposting / 'liking' other users' content, always ensure you are completely happy with all the wording, inferences, facts and sources used in the original post and any previous posts within its wider chain.
- Try to add value. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. The Authority is best represented by its Members and officers and what you publish may reflect on the Authority as a whole.

4. **Social Networks, Discussions Forums, Wikis, Blogs, etc.**

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- Consider establishing different social media accounts for different purposes, even when on the same online platform. This can often be an easier way to distinguish between your private and public roles or for various distinct roles within your public life e.g. where a member of multiple public organisations.

- 4.2 Use the privacy settings available. Background information you choose to share about yourself, such as information about your family or personal interests, may be useful in helping establish a relationship between you and your readers, but it is entirely your choice whether to share this information.
- 4.3 Take your time before posting - always re-read what you have written and/or leave drafts for posting at a later date or time when you have more capacity to fully consider it. On some platforms it is not possible to edit anything once posted and on many others it can be quite difficult; either way the damage may already be done in haste.
- 4.4 Consider the use of disclaimers on your post and/or profile(s) e.g. 'the views shared here are my own'. However, these do need to be very carefully worded and often cannot be completely relied upon.
- 4.5 Ask permission before posting someone's picture in a social network or a conversation that was meant to be private.
- 4.6 Under no circumstances should offensive comments be made about the Authority, other Members, staff, volunteers, or partners on the Internet. This may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 4.7 Never reveal confidential information, including details of internal discussions.
- 4.8 It is not advisable to invite customers of the Authority to become your friends in social networking sites where this may appear to be linked to the Authority's work. There may be a conflict of interest and/or security and privacy issues.
- 4.9 Ensure that your entries, articles or comments are neutral in tone, factual and verifiable. In addition, there are usually guidelines on sites such as Wikipedia on adding links. Read the guidelines carefully before submitting or editing an article.
- 4.10 If you edit online encyclopaedias from an Authority computer or other device the source of the correction may be recorded as an Authority IP address. The intervention may therefore look as if it comes from the Authority itself. You should therefore not act in a manner that brings or could be perceived to bring the Authority into disrepute. You should not post derogatory or offensive comments on any online encyclopaedias.
- 4.11 When correcting errors about the Authority, we should be transparent about who we are. We should never remove criticism of the Authority. Instead, we should respond to legitimate criticism. We should not remove derogatory or offensive comments but must report them to the relevant administrators for them to take action.
- 4.12 Before editing an online encyclopaedia entry about the Authority, or any entry which might be deemed a conflict of interest, you should consult the house rules of the site concerned and, if necessary, ask permission from the relevant content editor.

- 4.13 Use your best judgment. Remember that there are always consequences to what you publish. If you're about to publish something that makes you even slightly uncomfortable, review the suggestions above and take advice if necessary.

5. Video and Media sharing

- 5.1 Ensure that all photo permissions have been obtained and that video and media (including presentations) are safe to share and do not contain any personal, confidential, derogatory or defamatory information.
- 5.2 If the content is official and corporate Authority content then it must be labelled and tagged as such and must not appear to be associated with an individual.