



Social Media Policy

A comprehensive guide for social media use for the Basingstoke Canal Society channels and for individuals using social media in a personal capacity as a representative of the Society.

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and annually. The Basingstoke Canal Society will amend this policy, following consultations with volunteers working on the social media channel, where appropriate.

This policy is intended for all volunteers of the charity.

Before engaging in social media activity, you must read this policy, which contains guidance that will help you adhere to our standards.

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Contents

Introduction	3
What is social media?	3
Why do we use social media and what can we use it for?	3
Social media helps us to:	3
Why do we need a social media policy?	3
Responsibilities and breach of policy	4
Setting out the social media policy	4
Application	4
Internet access and monitoring usage	4
Point of contact for social media and authority to post on <i>[the Basingstoke Canal Society]</i> 's social media accounts	4
Which social media channels do we use?	4
Policy ownership	4
Code of Conduct headlines	5
Using <i>[the Basingstoke Canal Society]</i> 's social media channels — appropriate conduct	5
Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct	7
Further guidelines: using social media in a professional and personal capacity	10
Defamation	10
Copyright law	10
Confidentiality	10
Discrimination and harassment	10
Accessibility	10
The 'Lobbying Act'	11
Use of social media in the recruitment process	11
Use of social media to support fundraising activities	11
Protection and intervention	11
Under 18s and vulnerable people	11
Engaging on emotive topics	12
Public Interest Disclosure	12
Related policies, laws and guidance	12
Further external guidance	12

What is social media?

Social media is the collective term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create, share and interact with content (words, images, graphics and video content), as well as network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Twitch and TikTok.

Why do we use social media and what can we use it for?

Social media is essential to the success of communicating the Basingstoke Canal Society's work. It is important for volunteers to participate in social media to engage with our audiences and stakeholders, contribute to relevant conversations, and raise the profile of the Basingstoke Canal Society's work, using the charity's corporate accounts. Some volunteers may also support the charity's work using their personal accounts, and many will have social media accounts for personal use.

Building an engaged online community can lead to more significant long-term support and involvement from supporters. Social media guidance from the Charity Commission (September 2023) conveys how social media can be a highly effective way for a charity to engage its audiences and communicate about its work.

Social media helps us to:

- Promote our campaigns
- Share our news and updates with our audiences
- Engage in important conversations with stakeholders
- Celebrate our successes
- Raise awareness of important issues and challenges
- Advertise volunteering opportunities
- Support our fundraising activities
- Increase our membership
- Build an online supportive community
- Raise our public profile and strengthen our reputation
- React to quickly changing situations and topics

Why do we need a social media policy?

Social media is a fast-moving online world, where nuance and context can be easily lost. While social media brings the charity to a wide audience, it can also present risks. We want to ensure that all volunteers using social media represent and reflect the Basingstoke Canal Society in the best way possible. It is also important to mitigate risks (such as reputational or legal issues) associated with the use of social media to protect our supporters, volunteers, work and reputation.

While we encourage the use of social media to support our communications strategy or plans, we have important standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe and adhere to. The difference between a personal and professional opinion can also be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to Canal Society's work. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations and is subject to the same laws as other kinds of publication or commentary in the public domain.

Failure to comply with this policy could expose the Basingstoke Canal Society to reputational damage as well as putting volunteers and members at risk.

Responsibilities and breach of policy

Everyone is responsible for their compliance with this policy.

Participation in social media on behalf of the Basingstoke Canal Society is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect.

Breaches of policy or inappropriate behaviour could incur termination of your volunteering role.

Setting out the social media policy

Application

This policy applies to all social media platforms used by volunteers and members in a professional and personal capacity.

This policy also applies to online blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums, and messaging based apps, such as WhatsApp. Social media can be accessed in various ways, including from a desktop or laptop computer, tablet or smartphone. This policy applies to the use of all such devices.

Point of contact for social media and authority to post on the Basingstoke Canal Society's social media accounts

Our social media team volunteers are responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. If you have questions about any aspect of these channels, please share these with the Basingstoke Canal Society Committee. No other volunteer is permitted to post content on our official channels without prior permission.

Which social media channels do we use?

The Basingstoke Canal Society uses the following social media channels:

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn

All of these are used to share news, campaign messaging and updates relevant to those using the Canal and who live locally as well as inviting them to become members, volunteer or donate to the charity.

Policy ownership

The Committee is responsible for authoring and updating this document. The policy must be approved by the trustees and reviewed every year, unless a significant change requires the organisation to check the policy before the next review date. All volunteers will be notified of updates.

Code of conduct headlines

- I will not insult, harass, bully or intimidate individuals or organisations
- I will respond to others' opinions respectfully and professionally
- I will not do anything that breaches my volunteer role
- I will acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly
- I will disclose conflicts of interest where I am able
- I will not knowingly post inaccurate information
- I will link to online references and original source materials directly
- I will be considerate, kind and fair
- I will always ensure my activity does no harm to the organisation or to others
- I will champion the Basingstoke Canal Society and its services

Using the Basingstoke Canal Society social media channels — appropriate conduct

1. Know our social media guardians

The Social Media volunteers are responsible for setting up and managing the social media channels. They have overall ownership of these accounts and only those authorised to do so with team approval will have access to these accounts.

Social Media volunteers will uphold best practices for channel security with secure passwords that regularly change. Never give out the passwords for our channels without express permission from the full team.

2. Be an ambassador for our brand

Volunteers must ensure they reflect Basingstoke Canal Society values in what they post and use our tone of voice.

3. Always pause and think before posting

When posting from Basingstoke Canal Society's social media accounts, you must respond to comments in the voice of our charity and not allow your own personal opinions to influence responses. Volunteers must not reveal their personal opinions via our accounts by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'reposting' as the Basingstoke Canal Society, unless you are doing so as an individual volunteer as part of an approach agreed with the wider Marketing team. If you are in doubt about the Society's position on a particular issue, please speak to the Marketing Trustee or Committee.

4. Ensure brand consistency

Volunteers must not create or manage any other social media channels, groups or pages on behalf of the Canal Society without express permission from the Marketing Trustee/Committee. This is to ensure brand consistency for users, that the appropriate safeguarding and monitoring processes are in place and that this is appropriate for the Society.

5. Remember the bigger picture and focus on the benefit

Volunteers must make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit e.g. to further our charitable purposes (either directly or indirectly, by engaging stakeholders and building our brand using our strategy). All content must accurately reflect the Basingstoke Canal Society's agreed position and shared priorities.

6. Bring value to our audience(s)

Those responsible for the management of our social media accounts should answer questions as swiftly as possible, where possible, to help and engage with our service users and supporters.

7. Seek permission to share

If volunteers wish to contribute content for social media, they should obtain guidance and permission from the Social Media team.

8. Obtain consent

Volunteers must not post content about supporters or service users without their, or their guardian's, express permission. If volunteers are sharing information about supporters, service users or third-party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from the Basingstoke Canal Society. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, volunteers must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.

9. Put safety first

It can be challenging working on social media and there may be times where volunteers could be subject to unpleasant or abusive comments directed at the charity, our work or people. We encourage everyone who is on social media on behalf of the charity to be aware of dealing with online abuse and consult with the wider marketing team, where necessary.

It is also vital that the Basingstoke Canal Society does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials in pursuit of social media engagement. For example, a video of a stunt or visiting an unsafe location.

10. Stick to the law

Volunteers must not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.

11. Remain politically neutral

The Basingstoke Canal Society is not associated with any political organisation or has any affiliation with or links to political parties. We can express views where appropriate on policies that impact our work and service users, but it is essential that the Basingstoke Canal Society remains, and is seen to be, politically neutral.

We cannot endorse a political party or candidate. We must carefully manage the risk that we are perceived to have any party-political bias and should carefully consider any posts which might be perceived as such, for example, posts which talk about individual politicians or parties rather than policies.

12. Check facts and be honest

Volunteers should not automatically assume that material that's shared or included in any post is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification – for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it. But think first about how to manage any risk to the charity and its brand in doing so by consulting with Marketing Trustee/Committee to craft the response.

13. Seek advice for complaints

If a complaint is made on the Basingstoke Canal Society social media channels, volunteers should seek advice from the wider team before responding.

14. Know what to do in a crisis

Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation.

The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to the charity or our people. The Social Media team regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of the Basingstoke Canal Society so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, the Social Media team will escalate this to the trustees for appropriate next steps.

If any Volunteers or members outside of the social media team become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on the Basingstoke Canal Society's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the *Social Media team* immediately. It is the responsibility of all volunteers to report complaints or comments that could escalate into a crisis or have serious implications for the charity. Only the Social Media team are permitted to amend or delete content in a crisis.

See further guidance from CharityComms regarding [crisis communications and best practice](#).

15. Timings, schedules and rotas

The Canal Society Social Media team monitor and contribute to the social media pages seven days a week as they have their time available to do so. Different volunteers monitor different social media platforms and access this from multiple devices.

Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct

Personal social media use by volunteers can sometimes be attributed to the charity or bring other risks for the charity or individual volunteers. This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media, but instead flags up those areas in which risks or conflicts might arise. Basingstoke Canal Society volunteers are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are considerate of Society's values and policies, both online and in real life.

1. Separate your personal views

Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive the Basingstoke Canal Society. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the Society. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about the Basingstoke Canal Society work, you must use a disclaimer such as: "Views are my own" or "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Basingstoke Canal Society's positions, policies or opinions."

2. Take care when publishing personal views (particularly trustees)

Trustees must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing Basingstoke Canal Society's view.

3. Use your common sense and good judgement

Be aware of your association with the Basingstoke Canal Society and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself.

4. Don't approach VIPs directly

The Basingstoke Canal Society has discussions with several high-profile organisations and individuals, including Politicians and private organisations. Please don't approach high profile people or organisations from your personal social media accounts to ask them to support the charity, as this could hinder any potential relationships that are being managed by Committee members or other teams. This includes asking for reposts about the charity.

If you have any information about high profile people or organisations that have a connection to our cause, or if there is someone who you would like to support the charity, please speak to the Marketing Trustee to share the details.

5. Refer press enquiries

If a volunteer is contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to the Basingstoke Canal Society they should talk to the Marketing Trustee/Press Officer immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.

6. Keep your political activity separate from the charity

When representing the Basingstoke Canal Society volunteers are expected to uphold the charity's position. Volunteers who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from the Basingstoke Canal Society and understand and avoid potential risks and conflicts of interest. Volunteers should inform the Committee about any such political activity, and trustees should inform the Chair.

7. Protect your privacy

Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. Remember that a simple 'like' can draw attention to your personal accounts. What you publish is widely accessible and could be around for a long time, so do consider the content, and your privacy, carefully.

All volunteers who wish to engage with any of the Society's social media platforms are strongly advised to ensure that they set the privacy levels of their personal sites as strictly as they can and to opt out of public listings on social networking sites to protect their own privacy. Volunteers should keep their passwords confidential and change them often. Volunteers should not 'friend' or personally connect with service users or donors via social media unless explicit permission is given.

In their own interests, volunteers should be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers.

8. Help us to raise our profile (where appropriate)

We encourage volunteers and members to share posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support [*the Basingstoke Canal Society*] and the work we do. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy (and taking into consideration the information above), we encourage volunteers to do this as it helps users connect to us and raises our profile.

However, please take care to think about the reputation of the charity. If your personal social media account is not professional or otherwise appropriate for our audiences, please do not use it to amplify or promote the charity, as to do so brings risks both to you personally and to the charity. Similarly, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please highlight this to the [*team name or job title*] who will respond as appropriate.

9. Avoid logos or trademarks

Never use the Basingstoke Canal Society's logo unless approved to do so. Any content created must adhere to our brand guidelines and be in line with our charity tone of voice and objectives.

10. Staying safe online

It can be challenging working on social media and there may be times where volunteers could be subject to unpleasant or abusive comments directed at the charity, our work or people. We encourage everyone who is on social media to be aware of our safeguarding and wellbeing practices to deal with online abuse and consult with the Committee where necessary.

Volunteers should be vigilant regarding suspicious content or links and must not reveal personal, confidential or sensitive information about themselves, volunteers or supporters of the Basingstoke Canal Society. Volunteers should be wary of fake accounts that may claim to be Basingstoke Canal Society and should immediately escalate this.

Further guidelines: using social media in a professional and personal capacity

Defamation

Defamation is when a false statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published in print (such as in media publications) or online (such as Instagram Story, Facebook Live, Snapchat post). Whether volunteers are posting content on social media as part of their role or in a personal capacity, they should not bring the Basingstoke Canal Society into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

Copyright law

It is critical that all volunteers abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, when representing the charity. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

Confidentiality

Any communications that volunteers make must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that [*the Basingstoke Canal Society*] is not ready to disclose yet. For example, a news story that is embargoed for a particular date, or information from people who the charity has worked with which is private. Please refer to our [*policy name i.e. confidentiality policy*] for further information.

Discrimination and harassment

Volunteers should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official Basingstoke Canal Society social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief.
- Using social media to bully another individual.
- Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.

Accessibility

We endeavour to ensure our social media is as accessible as possible. This includes:

- Using plain English, accessible fonts and avoiding small text sizes
- Using contrasting colours
- Using subtitles where appropriate
- Using alt text for videos and images
- Explaining text contained in an image in the copy that accompanies it

You can view more guidance on the government website: [planning, creative and publishing accessible social media campaigns](#).

For accessibility best practices, visit the CharityComms resource: [Accessible communication - a starting point to foster more inclusive comms](#).

The Lobbying Act

Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose but can never be party political. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law (often known as the 'Lobbying Act'¹).

Under the Lobbying Act, organisations (including charities which spend more than £10,000 across the UK on 'regulated activity' during the regulated period need to register with [the Electoral Commission](#) within the outlined windows for elections.

Regulated activity is any activity which could reasonably be seen as intended to influence people's voting choice, either for parties or candidates (which a charity could never do) or for categories of candidates (e.g. female candidates, or candidates who support Net Zero). During these periods, all campaigning activity will be reviewed by the Marketing Trustee/Committee.

Use of social media to support fundraising activities

Our social media platforms play a key role in our fundraising efforts and engaging with our potential donors. Before using our social media channels for fundraising purposes, volunteers should read and adhere to [The Code of Fundraising Practices](#).

Under 18s and vulnerable people

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming or radicalisation. Where known, when communicating with vulnerable or young people under 18-years-old via social media, volunteers should ensure the online relationship with the Basingstoke Canal Society follows the same rules as offline.

¹ Set out initially in the [Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000](#), as amended by [the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014](#) and [the Elections Act 2022](#).

Volunteers should be aware that children under the age of 13 should not be encouraged to create their own personal social media accounts or engage with others and are not legally allowed to use social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram or X.

The Online Safety Act 2003 has introduced measures to ensure children are protected online.

Engaging on emotive topics

The Basingstoke Canal Society may be involved in issues that provoke strong emotions. The emotive content we share via our social media channels can engage our audiences and help us achieve our communications goals. However, it is important to plan appropriately and consider potential reputational risks to the charity. For more information, visit the government resource called charities and social media.

Public Interest Disclosure

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, if a volunteer releases information through the Basingstoke Canal Society's social media channels that is considered to be in the interest of the public.

Please note: While all attempts have been made to cover an extensive range of situations, it is possible that this policy may not cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document, or which directly contravene the standards outlined in this document.

It is expected that in these circumstances volunteers will always consult with the wider Social Media or Marketing team where possible or advise the team of the justification for any such action already taken or proposed.

Further external guidance

- The Charity Commission guidance for charities on social media
- The Charity Commission checklist for developing a social media policy
- National Cyber Security Centre's guidance on social media and how to use it safely
- National Cyber Security Centre's guidance on protecting your published content
- The Charity Commission guidance on campaigning and political activity guidance for charities
- Government guidance on the Online Safety Bill
- Bates Wells website