

About the Medbourne Email List

What follows is a transcript of an email sent to the village in March 2022 giving details of the decisions involved when publishing your messages.

Introduction

Having administered the village' email list for a long time situations have arisen that have resulted in some "case law" that I now use with regard to what I can publish.

There is one overriding thing to note, an email is not like a social media posting, it's a written, published document and subject to the law of the land. I have no option but to filter submissions for this reason alone.

I regard the email list primarily as a village news outlet. This means that most of the content should be factual.

There is also the notion of "scope". As one person working voluntarily I could easily be overwhelmed by the work, so there are boundaries that I maintain to keep the job do-able. As it happens, these boundaries focus the content on what matters most to the village, thereby avoiding "spam".

Underlying Principles

Based on experience I am now able to summarise the principles that govern what I do under a few simple headings:

- Legality
- Veracity (truthfulness)
- Community harmony
- Safety
- Privacy
- Scope

In addition, for the messages I publish there are editorial considerations and technical constraints that may not be obvious to subscribers.

Legality

Currently I have to consider the laws covering, libel, copyright, elections, data protection etc. In future we'll have the Online Harms Bill.

Veracity

I won't knowingly issue "fake news". There will be occasions when the truth of a statement can't be verified so, just like a newspaper, I can't publish. Examples are rumours circulating the village and reports of suspicious behaviour. The latter invariably involve a degree of

speculation and the odds are in favour of the behaviour being innocent. In the past I have published such messages only to be very embarrassed when informed of the real reasons for the behaviour.

Community Harmony

Actually, it's the opposite – avoiding the promotion of discord. Again, the email list is not social media and, as such, it avoids the phenomenon we now recognise as “online anger”. I aim to publish facts and not personal opinions (either mine or those of contributors) as there will be others who think differently. I aim to stay neutral on any matter where the village may have a range of different opinions.

I choose not to lecture the village on its behaviour (example dog poo) or take sides in potential disagreements (example planning applications). What often happens is that the matter is passed to the Parish Council. If they choose to address the issue with an email in their name, I publish that.

I believe I'm duty bound to publish communications from the Parish Council and our elected representatives. At election time this duty extends to other candidates but I can only issue what I'm sent. All such messages are sent out in the name of the sender who is then responsible for compliance with electoral regulations.

Safety

This includes online safety (e.g. scams) and anything else which might be harmful. For any message that contains a link to the internet I verify the link before I send out the message. Email scams are now commonplace and I cannot risk promulgating a scam to the whole village.

Privacy

It's as well to understand the law on Data Protection. It means that any data I store (e.g. your email address) can only be used for the purpose that you gave it. That means I can't answer the frequent requests to supply someone's email. If a submission includes the sender's email in the text I assume that as the written permission needed to publish. I can't avoid sending out the subscriber's name in most cases. However, I won't publish anyone's name if sent in a message from someone else unless I'm sure that person is in agreement. An example is a “Thank You” message naming someone – nice idea but a potential embarrassment to the nominee.

The Data Protection issue has a major impact on any replies to my messages. I can't forward these to the submitter of the message without divulging the sender's email. So I have to copy the reply into an email sent from me. I can end up as the ongoing postman between submitter and commenter and, not surprisingly, I strive hard to avoid this situation.

Scope

The most notable item under scope is locality. This is a policy decision which means that I only cover Medbourne and Nevill Holt. If I were to cover events and news from other villages it would add significantly to my workload whilst generating emails of lesser interest to residents

I have to be fair. If I provide a service to one person it should be available to everyone else. For this reason I won't offer items for sale. There may be other cases in future where I will prefer not to set a precedent. I do publish "freebies" as they may benefit someone else in the community.

I have become more careful about any message that asks residents to part with money. Apart from the risks of scam, I take the view that some (most?) subscribers will not want to be bombarded with requests for cash. Obviously, there are requests from village charities and residents who organise fundraising events for other charities (e.g. Macmillan coffee mornings). There are also examples beyond the village (like the UCC Fire Appeal) which have a direct bearing on the village. Beyond that, I prefer not to publicise the various Just Giving pages and favourite charities that subscribers ask to be communicated. In essence, this comes under the "local only" policy.

I do not publish links to social media. As a non-user I can't verify them. Subscribers can't use the links unless already registered with the platform; they will be invited to join the platform which is a side effect I'd prefer to avoid. I work on the assumption that those in the village with an interest in the posting should have seen it on social media already.

Editorial Changes

There are now well over 200 people on the list - more than we have households in the village. I have to imagine the message being read by a huge cross-section of ages, skills, interests, etc. Not surprisingly, some messages need work to make them totally "audience-friendly". From experience I know that confusing messages and errors generate an overload of responses. This can cause a disproportionate amount of work as described earlier.

Many messages are written to me – "David, can you please tell the village ...". I then have to compose the whole message. So please note that I prefer a block of text addressed to the village that I can cut and paste straight into the email. Even then, I will go through the text to fix spelling, grammar and fonts.

Attachments and Pictures

I don't send out attachments. Some subscribers have size limits on their Inbox and, some won't have the software to read certain formats. More importantly, most of my messages are reproduced on the Medbourne Twitter feed (@Medbourne565) where the attachments can't be delivered. Consequently, attachments are converted to PDF format and uploaded to the village web site. I then edit the message to include a link to the online file. The

Twitter posting includes the same link. Attachments such as posters are needed for the online diary so don't stop sending them.

Embedded photos in submissions are also an issue and I do not copy them into the messages I send out. From the messages I receive I know that some subscribers cannot receive pictures. Hence, photos also have to be uploaded to the internet. It's quite a bit of work so when I receive multiple photos I often choose just one, and sometimes none, if the message is clear without the missing pictures.

Finally

I do realise that this particular email breaks some of the rules!

The email list continues to grow year on year and newcomers seem to find out about it and sign up. Nobody has ever unsubscribed from the village list unless they were leaving the village!

If you've made it to the end of this tome then thank you for reading it. I hope you found it useful.