



The Local Channel



Community Engagement Pack

**The Local Channel has four support facilities available.**

1. Free phone 0800 38 986 38 (8.00 am - 6.00 pm, 5 days a week)
2. Email [info@thelocalchannel.co.uk](mailto:info@thelocalchannel.co.uk) which we monitor throughout the waking hours and respond to within 24 hours (and often much faster).
3. Download user manuals and “screen by screen” video guides from <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk>
4. Post:

The Local Channel,  
The Estate Office,  
Trafalgar Park,  
Downton,  
Salisbury SP5 3QG

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## About the Community Engagement Pack.

Welcome to The Local Channel, and thank you for being part of the UK's fastest growing network of local community web sites.

In this pack, you'll find ideas, tips, advice, and support material to help your community get the most from your web site.

You see, when we built the technology behind your Local Channel web site we did it so that *everyone* in your community could use and benefit from it ... it's not all down to one person to do everything!

We've written this Engagement Pack to try and help new Community Web Editors get going, but it may well serve to help existing ones too - as well as many other people who want to help their community take advantage of their Local Channel web site. And *everyone* has a Local Channel web site, because we've built one for *every* community.

What we've done in this pack is to;

- Explain how to get your site started... what pages to create first, how to build them, and ideas to make them look good and be useful.
- Give you some ideas about easy ways to let the groups, clubs, teams, societies, businesses ... and everyone else in the community know about your site (as well as answering the most common questions that people ask).
- Draw on some of the best practice in the 2,600 UK communities who are now using The Local Channel... there are some really great ideas out there!

We've written this Community Engagement Pack so that you can either read it in one go, or just dip into the specific parts that you're most interested in at any particular moment. We hope you enjoy it, and that it can help you and your community to build the web site that *you* want.

## What is the role of the Community Web Editor?

When the local council adopt their Local Channel site from TLC, they need someone to look after it for them... and that person is called the Community Web Editor.

The Community Web Editor usually has 3 roles within their site.

1. To construct the community's home page – and to periodically refresh it.
2. To enter the Council's information on the site (minutes and agendas typically).
3. To let the rest of the community know that the site is available for their use.

There are a few other things that some Web Editors do (such as entering information for other people in the community), but these are by exception, not necessary, and not the general rule.

This "Community Engagement Pack" provides all the information that a Web Editor needs to help them get started, and to introduce The Local Channel to their community.

***A little background to the Web.***



## The scale of the Web.

It may seem remarkable to our children, but the web is just 17 years old.

Yet today, it constantly touches most aspects of many people's lives. Whether searching for directions or information; comparing prices and buying goods; playing games; arranging travel; downloading music; making friends - the web is ever-present.

Even the lives of people who have never personally used the web are deeply affected by it, and in ways they may not immediately realise; the shops they visit run their systems over the web, the newspapers they read could not be created without the web.

A January 2005 study determined that there were over 11.5 billion web pages publicly visible on the web, written in 75 different languages, and being surfed by 1.1 billion people – 17% of the world's population. Two years on, these numbers will only have increased.

The Web is clearly the most far-reaching and extensive medium of personal exchange to appear on Earth. It has allowed many of its users to interact with more groups of people dispersed around the planet, than would ever be possible when limited by physical contact. Indeed, it has probably had a greater impact than every other existing medium of communication combined.

**And The Local Channel brings the web to every community in the UK – in a way that everyone with access to a computer and the internet can use.**

## The difference between the web and the internet.

Strictly speaking, the words "Internet" and "World Wide Web" are not synonymous - although they are often referred to as though they were one and the same thing.

- The **Internet** is actually a collection of interconnected computer networks, linked (typically) by copper wires, fiber-optic cables or wireless connections.
- The **World Wide Web** ("**WWW**" or simply the "**Web**") is a global information medium that operates over the Internet just as many other services do - such as e-mail. It enables users to read and write via computers connected to the Internet. The Internet therefore pre-dates the Web by many years.
- Perhaps a good way to think of the Internet is as the road system, and the Web as the road users (cars, buses, trucks and passengers) who are traveling over the system.

Sources:

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

<http://www.internetworldstats.com>

<http://www.cs.uiowa.edu/~assignori/web-size/>

## *About The Local Channel*



## About The Local Channel.

The Local Channel is the UK's fastest growing network of local community web sites. Over 2,600 communities (25% of rural UK) have now adopted their own Local Channel site, so you are in good company!

Launched in 2001, The Local Channel has built a local web site for every one of the 21,000 communities in the UK – and each community site is dynamically linked into one unified national network. The local sites are flexible templates with a place for all aspects of a community including the local council, teams, groups, societies, clubs, businesses, a diary, and local news. The Local Channel also provides local BBC news, and Thomson Local Directory information for all sites.

The Local Channel is geographically mapped to the first level of Government, which is a parish, town or ward (or a community in Scotland and Wales). By mapping to the first level of Government, every community in the UK has a site and none are omitted. Genuinely, this is a local web site for *everyone* in the UK.

Not only can information be posted onto the site by the community, the site itself also links into regional and central government information. Thus content in the site is uniquely created from the “bottom up”, and also from the “top down” - it is the place where local people and all levels of government meet.

The site is delivered to the community, hosted, maintained and developed - all without charge. Further, The Local Channel provides support for each community's site through a free-phone (weekdays 8.00am to 6.00pm), and email.

There are a range of services which enable businesses to promote themselves to their local customers (for which The Local Channel makes a small charge).

The Local Channel has a growing international presence:

- In the last 12 months, 23% of communities in Slovakia have adopted their Local Channel site – and this is on course to reach 50% by the end of 2007.
- The system is currently being trialed in Moscow.
- Government interest in The Local Channel has been shown by several countries including China – and negotiations have begun for further international rollouts.

Established since 2001, The Local Channel is a privately owned UK company based in a converted stable block in the grounds of Trafalgar Park near Salisbury, Wiltshire.

## **Benefits that a Local Channel web site offers the community.**

Each web site is a cohesive source of local information for everyone to share, detailing what's going on, when and where. Your local web site can:

### Enable local clubs, societies, groups and teams to:

Promote their activities to the community; to let members of the club know about meeting times and venues; and to enlist new members and help. For example:

- The local football club can report on recent games, training times, venues, team selections, and include a message such as, "Come and cheer on your local football team this Saturday at 3.00pm on the recreation ground when we play a crunch promotion game",
- The Local Dramatic Society can announce "Rehearsals for the Amateur Dramatic Society's production of Puss in Boots will be in the Village Hall at 7.00pm on Thursday – all budding stage hands welcome!"

### Help the Local Council to:

- Easily and efficiently distribute their minutes and agendas (amongst other community information),
- Display profiles of the local councillors, and their contact details,
- Publicise planning applications and decisions,
- Obtain feedback on issues affecting the community,
- And of course they can use the site to publicise public meetings.

### Support local businesses by:

- Providing facilities for them to promote themselves to the very people most likely (geographically) to want their products and services,
- Demonstrating their involvement and support for their community (after all, it is their financial support that enables The Local Channel to provide and maintain the community's web site).

### Encourage people from outside of the local community to:

- Find things to do, and places to eat or stay. These may be potential visitors to the area, perhaps on holiday or perhaps travelling on business.
- Stay in touch. Perhaps these are people who used to live in the community and want to keep in contact with old friends.
- Discover more about the area. These could include people moving to the region, or looking for a new community to move to locally.

### And most importantly – enable local residents to find all these things. To:

- Know what's happening in their community. They can find out what the local organisations are doing; what events are taking place, when, and where.
- Discover what special offers local businesses have, when they are open – or even "I've got a burst pipe, what's the number of the nearest plumber? Quick!"
- Reach their local representatives; to contribute their views on local matters, and also find out about local services - dustbin collection times, bus times, road works.

In fact, pretty much everything that we all want to know about our own community can be on your Local Channel site, once you start to use it to its full potential.

## Ideas for what your community web site could contain.

There are two types of information on The Local Channel site:

1. What The Local Channel “automatically” delivers to the site for you, including:
  - The Google search facility (just type in what you want to find, and Google will search all 11.5 billion + pages on the web, in fractions of a second, to find it for you).
  - The “Search the Local Channel” facility (which works in the same way as the Google search facility – but searches content anywhere within all Local Channel sites).
  - The best of the BBC news that is local to the region which includes your community.
  - The Thomson Local Directory – enabling you to find the local business you need (with map and contact details).
  - And of course all the information about The Local Channel itself, including “how to use the site”, and the terms and conditions of use.
2. Content created by the community, for the community, within the template provided.  
For example:
  - The council, all local clubs / groups / societies and teams, and all businesses can have their own web pages within the community site – for example,
    - Football / hockey / cricket / darts / bowls / golf clubs can give match reports,
    - Local branches of the WI, Lions, Rotary can promote their fund-raising,
    - The scouts, brownies, rainbows, beavers, amateur dramatics, photographic, flower arranging, and historical societies can all promote their activities,
    - Local businesses, in addition to buying web pages, can also take advantage of the business listings facility - *and* a unique “pay per performance” local coupon scheme called TLC Offers.
    - The local council can share their minutes and agendas as well as other information.
  - There is a community diary section – so that at a glance, everyone can see what’s going on, where and when.
  - Local news can be posted onto the community site as well.
  - And there can be a section on the community’s history (this is often managed by the local council).

Most importantly, your site has been designed so that it does not rely on a single web editor to enter, update and administer all this information!

- There can be more than one web editor for the council.
- Each separate organisation can appoint one (or more) of their own web editors to control the content for their own organisation – these individuals simply have to register with The Local Channel and are then empowered to run their organisation’s section of the site (within the Terms and Conditions of Use of The Local Channel).

All that the Community Web Editor(s) have to do is let these organisations know the site is available for everyone in the community to safely use (and we provide materials and ideas to support this activity).

## Frequently asked questions.

### ***What's the catch – how can you offer The Local Channel “free”?***

The local Channel has 2 business models.

1. In several countries, the local or national government pay a licence fee to The Local Channel so that we can provide web sites to their local communities. They see this as an important service which connects local people with each other and with their local, regional and national elected representatives.
2. In the UK, the government does not (yet!) take this view and currently provides no funding for The Local Channel. So in the UK, The Local Channel is funded through a combination of investment by our shareholders and our commercial activities – mainly the sale of web sites to local businesses and banner advertising. There is a virtuous circle at work here;
  - The better we make the site, the more people will value it, and use it.
  - The more they use it, the more attractive the site becomes to local businesses...and the more likely we are to cover our costs and also to be able to continue improving the site.
  - An improved site leads to yet *more* people using it ... and we will have yet *more* funds available to further improve the site.
  - It is commercial activities which enable The Local Channel to provide, maintain and develop the sites to each community.

### ***Will it always be free?***

- The Local Channel offer each parish, community and town council in the UK its own web site already mapped to that community's geographic area, on the premise that it is free for the community to use. All councils who have adopted their community site on that basis will always have their site free of charge.
- Although we have no plans to introduce a charge for new adoptions in the future, we do reserve the right to review and change that policy. Were we to make such a change though it would apply to new council adoptions, and not to councils currently using their Local Channel site. So if your council have already adopted their Local Channel site – any future change in charging policy won't apply to you!

### ***What exactly does the Local Channel provide “free”?***

What is included in the “package” that we offer a community without charge, is:

1. The web site template, ready mapped to the geographic area of the local council, and with dynamic links to every other community in the country,
2. All the tools built into the system (the content manager which enables everyone to enter their content to the site; the local BBC news; the Google search facility – and many more),
3. All site maintenance (if there's a bug, or a link not working, we fix it),
4. All site development (see page 33 for the things we're working on),
5. The hosting (the secure servers that hold The Local Channel web site and connect it to the internet).
6. Extensive support
  - A free-phone support number, manned from 8.00 to 6.00, 5 days a week, and with emergency cover at all other times,
  - 24 hour email support,
  - An extensive user manual library (and we're just converting these into screen-by-screen videos to make them even more friendly).

We think it's a pretty comprehensive package. Especially at the price ☺ !

### ***We already have a web site, so why should we use The Local Channel?***

Firstly – we think it’s great if your community already has a web site. Not surprisingly, we believe that community web sites are a good thing. Very often “stand alone” community web sites have been built and are run day-in and day-out by dedicated local people giving up a lot of their free time. Believe me, we know how much work that can involve – and we have a deep respect for their efforts (and their results ... many are good sites). We do have a few suggestions however where we think The Local Channel can help.

- There is a cost for building and running your own web site. Typical costs include paying for the initial site design, the hosting, the maintenance and any upgrades. And often support is also charged for. These costs may add up to £500 a year – sometimes much more. And these charges are either paid by the individual, or by the local council. However, The Local Channel has already built a web site for each community in the UK; each of these sites is linked into every other site in the national network. All hosting, maintenance, and development are included. And on top of this, we also provide free-phone and email support. The Local Channel provides all of this without charge.
- Then there’s the work load involved in running a local web site. If the existing site has been built so that only the web master can enter content, then they have to do everything. Initially that may be exciting, but over time it can become a bit of a chore. It’s surprisingly easy for information to get dated – we’ve seen a few sites recently that still say “welcome to the new millennium”! But if everyone can contribute a few words on their own subject for their own organisation, the site remains fresh. Truly – “many hands make light work”.
- Communities who have their own site tend to do one of two things when faced with The Local Channel opportunity:
  1. Either they keep running their own site but link to their Local Channel site, and post some of their content on both sites (we can help them do this). In this way, people searching The Local Channel network can read a “taster”, and then be redirected onto the community’s existing site.
  2. Or they completely transfer their existing site over to their Local Channel site and often the person who had been running the previous site becomes the web editor for the new Local Channel site. This way they combine their interest in running the community site, with all the (free) support and facilities provided by The Local Channel.

### ***No one here has the technical skills to build a web site***

- Well, the oldest person we know of who is running their Local Channel site is a gentleman aged 86. So that means he was 70 years old and had been retired for 5 years when the web was invented! The beauty of The Local Channel is that you don’t have to be a technical expert to use it. If you have a computer and access to the internet, you can use The Local Channel.
- We provide full user manuals and on-line screen-by-screen video support to help you – and we’re only a (free)-phone call away if you want someone to talk you through “how to do something” on the site. Really, we’re only too pleased to hear from you and to help.

## **Why do I have to register on The Local Channel site?**

### **a. Why register**

Anyone can read the public information on the site without needing to register. But before anyone can actually post content onto the site, we do need them to register with us. This is simply so that we are able to contact anyone who posts items to the site should any issue subsequently arise with their posting.

### **b. What information do we gather, and what do we do with it.**

There are 5 types of information that we gather

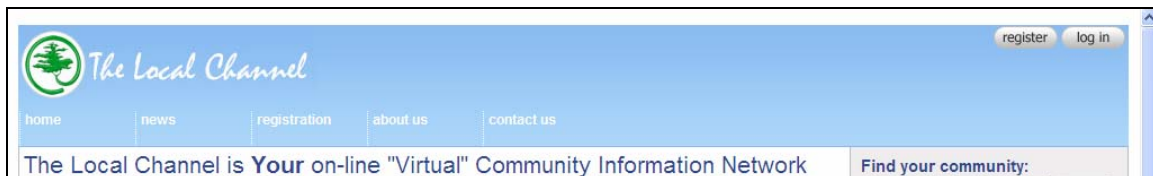
1. NAME
  - Title / Forename / Surname
2. ADDRESS
  - Full address including postcode
3. CONTACT INFORMATION
  - Phone / E-mail (and mobile & fax are optional)
  - If you have a web address, we'd like to know what it is – (optional).
4. GENERAL
  - Sex (i.e. Male / Female)
  - What is your preferred language for the web site (currently English only within the UK)
5. PASSWORD
  - Password (must be at least 8 characters)
  - Date of Birth (used as a security question if you forget your password)
  - Mother's Maiden Name (may also be used as a security question if you forget your password)

Your email address is then your “username” which you use when you log on.

The Local Channel is registered with The Data Protection Act for the purposes of holding this data. We never – ever – share / sell / or otherwise distribute this information with any other organisation, and we never will. We ask for this data and then hold it so that we can identify people who are in a position to post information to The Local Channel web site. To be frank it would be rather irresponsible of us *not* to gather and hold this information.

### **c. How to register**

Simply go to [www.thelocalchannel.co.uk](http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk) and click on the word “registration” or the registration button - both are on the blue banner at the top of the screen.



Clicking on either link opens the 1 page registration form. Fill in the details as above, then click the button at the foot of the page marked “submit”, and that’s it.

We’ll then send you an acknowledging email so we can confirm the email address is working.

***What happens if someone posts something derogatory on the site - or even defamatory? Who's responsible / how do we get it removed?***

The legal position is this.

- The terms and conditions for posting information onto The Local Channel are clear that the responsibility rests with the person who posts the content. *[This is one of the reasons that we require everyone posting content on the site to register with us first... that way we have their contact details.]*
- Thus a council who adopt their Local Channel site on behalf of their community are responsible for the content that they themselves post to the site (or that the Community Web Editor posts on their behalf). The council are not responsible for content that anyone else posts to their community site.
- A link to The Local Channel's terms and conditions is provided on every page of the site. To summarise the spirit of those terms and conditions - all content has to be "legal, decent, honest and truthful"; the sort of thing that you'd expect of a community site which can be viewed and used by everyone in the community – young and old alike.
- The Local Channel's responsibility operates "in retrospect" – it is to investigate, and if necessary remove, any content that breaches these conditions and to do so promptly once notified of a potential breach. We have the ability to go into any part of the system, and have the systems in place to ensure that we can respond rapidly.
- So if you see something on your site that you feel breaches the terms and conditions of use (or it could be on any other community's site for that matter) ... just call or email us to tell us what you've seen and where it is.
- What we'll do immediately we receive your message is;
  - View the material,
  - Remove it from the site if we agree that it breaches our terms and conditions of use
  - Contact the person who posted it to tell them that their content has been taken down, why, and how they might rectify the material. The complainant is never identified.
- If the material posted was of a nature that merited reporting to an authority (police, social services, etc), we will take a copy of the offending content, remove it from the site and promptly notify the appropriate authority.

***What happens if I get stuck when trying to do something on the site?***

We provide 4 free support facilities because we don't want you to be stuck, any more than *you* want to be stuck! You can:

1. Take a look at the user manuals, and video "screen-by-screen demos" at <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk>
2. Email us at [info@thelocalchannel.co.uk](mailto:info@thelocalchannel.co.uk). We always reply within 24 hours (or on Monday morning if you email at the weekend) ... and during working hours we'll often get back to you within the hour.
3. Call us – free-phone – on 0800 38 986 38, during office hours.
4. Write to us at The Local Channel Limited, The Estate Office, Trafalgar Park, Downton, Salisbury, SP5 3QG. United Kingdom.

### ***Is the site safe for children to use?***

We certainly believe it is. There are two aspects to this question:

1. Is the site safe for children to read?

The site is intended for everyone in the community to read. The way that we ensure this is the case is by;

- a. Requiring everyone who posts content to register with us first - which secures their agreement to our terms and conditions of use, and also gives us the means to contact them should an issue subsequently arise.
  - b. By acting promptly to any complaints about content that we receive. We rapidly review any content which is the subject of a complaint, and can instantly remove any inappropriate content.
2. Is the site safe for children to post content? There are three ways to add content to the site, only one of which is open to children under 16 years.
- a. **Contributor.** A child can be a “contributor” and post content to the site and as explained above, before *anyone* can post *anything* they first have to register with The Local Channel (so we hold the contact details for everyone posting content). The Local Channel does not make those contact details public or display them on the site, though obviously the contributor can do so within their content.
  - b. **Web editor.** Web editors are empowered to post general community information – and have to be over 18 years old.
  - c. **Advertiser.** An advertiser has to be over 16 years old, because a credit card is needed to pay on-line for the ads. This applies to classified ads as well as display ads.

### ***What’s a community home page and what should it contain?***

Your home page is the gateway into your community; it’s the first thing that visitors see when they go to your community site. So naturally having a welcoming home page is a good idea!

It’s also worth remembering that the same person may well come back to your web site time and again, so it’s a good idea to try and keep your home page “fresh”. This is one reason The Local Channel provides a live local-news feed from the BBC.

Some communities have home pages which detail the history of their community. It’s often very interesting but it should be borne in mind that once a visitor has read the place’s history once ... well why would they read it twice? Historic events in most communities tend to occur infrequently so it makes for a static home page.

Others however place their historic information in a section of its own so they can ring the changes on their home page – for instance:

- The latest community news;
- Exam results of the local school;
- How the swimming club got on at the latest swimming gala;
- News of the meeting with planners about a road or housing development.

These web editors think of their home page as if it was the front page of a newspaper - and they use that page to entice the visitor to read more about their community.

There’s not a right or wrong – but it’s worth thinking about.



***How The Local Channel can help the local council.***



## Local Council content.

### How The Local Channel can help a local council

1. To achieve “quality parish” status a parish council needs a web site, and by adopting their Local Channel web site the council can fulfil that requirement for the community.
2. For most local councils, money is tight. Very few have the funding required to deliver all they need to, let alone want to. The Local Channel web site (hosting, maintenance, support – everything) is provided free of charge to the community. So money that the council might otherwise have to spend on a community web site can be used for other things.
  - o With so many demands for the council’s budget, why would a council choose to spend their limited funds on a community web site, when The Local Channel offer a high quality, fully supported template enabling the community to build their own content in the way that they see fit? And without charging.
3. For many people electronic communication is fast and efficient – it is their preferred means to share information. Certainly not for everyone, but for many people – and an increasing number. When information is shared on-line, it means that there are fewer requests to the parish clerk for “copies of minutes”, etc (each request entails a phone call / photocopying of the minutes, addressing an envelope, buying a stamp, going to the post box, postage and 2 days for delivery). The council post information on-line just once, and it is available instantly to everyone:
  - o Minutes & Agendas.
  - o Time / venue of the next public meeting.
  - o Resolutions.
  - o Items for consultation.
  - o Planning applications and decisions.
  - o Anything else the council wants / needs to make publicly available.
4. Young people in particular spend a lot of time on-line. In fact people under 35 years old spend more time on-line than watching TV, or reading newspapers. They are also the people who generally display less interest in the activities of local councils, or vote in local and national elections. Perhaps a good way to engage these people is to use the medium they prefer ... on-line.
5. The Local Channel is currently testing a “polling” tool, and when we are happy that it works well we’ll make it available to each council. This means that councils will have the ability to ask quick questions of their community – and get quick responses. This should be a very useful additional tool for the council. The Local Channel will also have the ability to ask the same question nationally and then analyse the results by region, so we can see the regional differences in the answers to the same question.

### A few examples of councils using their Local Channel site

Tillicoultry, Clackmannanshire	<a href="http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/tillicoultry">www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/tillicoultry</a>
Shalford, Essex	<a href="http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/shalford">www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/shalford</a>
Southwater, West Sussex	<a href="http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/southwater">www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/southwater</a>
Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Staffs	<a href="http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/HeathHayesEastandWimblebury">www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/HeathHayesEastandWimblebury</a>
Barnby Dunn with Kirk Sandall South Yorks	<a href="http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/bdwithkspc">www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/bdwithkspc</a>

*The wider community*



## Why engage the community?

The Local Channel community sites are exactly that ... community sites, built for the whole community to use. We were careful to design and build the sites this way, because our vision is to enable:

1. Local people running local groups, clubs, teams and societies to reach the local audience that they want to join their organisation, and support their activities.
  - One challenge faced by many local councils is to support the local community's social and economic vitality, and many councils think that their Local Channel site is a great asset.
2. The local council's information is placed within a site being used by the whole community, it is seen by far more people than would be the case if it were placed on a site reserved exclusively for the council's use.
  - Your Local Channel site, when used by the whole community, can be thought of as your community's on-line high street and the council's information as being prominent on your on-line high street.
3. The whole community to share in their own lively and exciting site.
  - It is unlikely that postings by a single person or organisation (even the local council) can equal the breadth and depth of content that whole community can contribute.
4. Shared workload.
  - It can be hard work for one individual to be responsible for posting all information to the site; but when the task is shared it becomes easy and enjoyable.
5. Your site is dynamically linked to every other Local Channel site in the UK ... so all the organisations in your community are also linked into a national network.
  - Which means it is increasingly easy for potential visitors to your community to find them, and support them.
6. When the local council adopt their site and start using it, they show leadership to the community.
  - The design of the site enables the whole community to follow their example and post information about their own organisations.

## Why we ask Web Editors to help engage the community.

The Local Channel has built the template site for your community, but clearly you know your community better than we do. We provide support, advice, posters, guides etc to help both you and your community use the site, but the person best placed to let everyone locally know that the site is available for their use is ... you.

So we would appreciate your help to spread the word about The Local Channel within your community.

To be clear, we are not asking you to “sell” The Local Channel; but it is fair to say that we are asking you to help us “give” The Local Channel away to your community. The reasons we ask for your help are these:

- We provide the site (development, maintenance, support, hosting, and enhancements) without charge to your community – and we are happy to do so. But The Local Channel receives no Government funding and so has to be a commercial enterprise.
  - *Being a commercial enterprise means that The Local Channel's sustainability rests in our own hands; whereas relying on Government funding would mean being constantly subject to changes outside our influence, perhaps in policy or budget cuts.*
- But what this does mean is that for us to build and support your site (and all the other sites in the UK network), we need your community to use the site – because when they use it, we have the prospect of earning an income from selling web pages to local businesses.
- It is only when local people use your site that we can earn the income required to run the network and repay our investors, so those local people;
  - Need to find your site helpful and easy to use (*so you can bet that we've tried really hard to make sure the site delivers what your community wants*).
  - But first of all – they need to find it. If they don't know your site exists, they don't have the opportunity to use it.
    - We're doing a lot of work to make your site visible to all the big search engines (for example Google), but you can make a big difference by introducing your site to your community.

And of course, people will only use your site if it is useful ... which is the *raison d'être* of your site.

So, it's *your* help in introducing *your* site to your community that enables *us* to maintain and support *your* site (and everyone else's).

And that's why we ask you to contact the people within your community who may benefit from the site. We've got lots of tips on who to approach, how to do it, information you can give them, and what the answers are to the “frequently asked questions”.

## **Groups / Clubs / Societies / Teams.**

There are all sorts of Groups / Clubs / Societies / Teams who can benefit from using your community's Local Channel site. These might include:

- Youth organisations
  - Scouts, Brownies, Rainbows, Beavers, Cubs,
- Sports clubs and teams
  - Football, cricket, netball, tennis, hockey, swimming, cycling, bowls
- Local Organisations & Groups – and local branches of national groups
  - Women's Institute, Rotary, Lions
  - RSPB, Wildlife, National Trust
  - Amateur dramatics, choir, flower arranging, historical societies, horticultural societies.
- Churches and church based groups
  - Choirs, bell-ringing etc.

And there are many *many* more in most communities.

### **Support for a Local Channel web editor wanting to talk to a local organisation**

#### **How to track the local organisation down**

You may well already know who runs many of your local organisations (and local branches of national organisations), but if not, here are the sorts of places where you can find the phone numbers of the local people who run these organisations:

- The village store / newsagent / post office / notice boards often have postcards or A4 sheets promoting the local organisations.
- The village / church hall are a good source of information on organisations that use those facilities.
- The local library and the district council web site will hold good contact information.
- Local mums are a good place to get the contact numbers for youth organisations (scouts / guides and the like)
- The local paper and the parish / community magazine can also be treasure troves.

And remember – if it isn't easy for you to find this information, it the chances are that it isn't easy for anyone else either, which underlines why your community web site, with all of this information readily available, is such a useful idea.

#### **The benefits that the Groups / Clubs / Societies / Teams can gain, include**

- Promoting their activities and events to the community.
- Letting members (as well as the wider community) know what is happening, when, and where.
- Selling tickets for those events.
- Recruiting more members, and enlisting support for their activities.
- Including events in the community diary.

## The questions most frequently asked by local organisations

### ***“We already have a web site / our national organisation has a web site”***

Great! And many organisations that already have a web site use the Local Channel as well. There are several reasons for this:

1. The Local Channel site is for the whole community. So anyone visiting the community site will see that organisation's content within it. But when an organisation has its own a “stand alone site”, the only people who are ever likely to see it are those deliberately looking for that organisation... not the casual visitor. If you think of your Local Channel site as the community's virtual high street, then the organisation with web pages on your site has a presence right in the heart of that high street, not hidden away on a side road. “Out of sight” can easily be “out of mind” on the web.
2. Posting content within The Local Channel is easy ... “cut and paste”. So if the organisation is entering content to their existing site, they can cut and paste it into their Local Channel site in moments and so be visible to a larger audience with virtually no additional effort. Linking between their existing site and a Local Channel site is easy - so that a visitor to either site is just a single click from the other site.
3. Cost. The Local Channel site is free for all not-for-profit organisations. Therefore some organisations will run their new Local Channel site alongside their current site while they evaluate it. After evaluation, they may make the decision to switch to the Local Channel site and save money by closing their current site.

### ***We don't know where to start, and have no technical skills.***

The Local Channel site is specifically built for people who have never before posted information on a web site. The only things you need are access to a computer and access to the internet. It also helps if you can type (two fingers and very slowly is quite enough!). With that – you can create a web site for your organisation that the world can see, and that you can readily change. And we are always available to help

- Telephone: free-phone number 0800 38 986 38
- Email: info@thelocalchannel.co.uk
- Fax: 01722 713359
- Post: The Local Channel, The Estate Office,  
Trafalgar Park, Downton, Salisbury SP5 3QG

### **Promotional material available**

Available from <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk>

- An A4 and postcard-sized poster to stick up on public notice boards in the community.
- A leaflet called “introducing The Local Channel to community organisations”.
- A user manual – how to create an organisation's web site (the manual is available as a PDF document and screen-by-screen video guide).

## Schools.

Schools are a very special type of local organisation. They can add much to your community site - and they also may have some specific questions, which is why we have a separate section for them. The chances are high that you will know which schools are in your community (!), but knowing who to approach within the school may not be as simple and will vary according to the school. The choices are usually;

- The Head
- The Web Editor / bursar / school office
- The head of IT
- Some schools have a community liaison officer
- The Parent / Teacher Association.

Unless you know the right person in your school, the school office is a good place to start.

### **Benefits available for the school**

Schools are central to the community. Many people within your community will have a relationship with the local school – whether as students, parents, relatives, staff, or suppliers to the school. When the local school has a presence on your Local Channel web site it places them at the heart of your “on-line community”, just as they are in “real life”.

- The school may already have its own site – which is great. But a visitor is only likely to find the school’s own site if they are specifically looking for it – they are unlikely to attract casual visitors.
  - On the other hand, because The Local Channel site is for the whole community, someone visiting your Local Channel site will see the school’s pages (the school’s news / events / diary items can even be flagged on the community home page). Being on your Local Channel site gives the school a presence on your community’s on-line high street.
  - And this can be *in addition* to the school’s current site (remember, posting content onto the Local Channel is as simple as “cut and paste” – and their Local Channel site is free).
- Many schools publicise their activities (the pages of the local papers are full of local school Christmas Fairs, summer parties, and other fund-raising activities). Providing that same material on your Local Channel site is an easy way for the school to extend this publicity.
- All schools can use The Local Channel without charge – and the school determine what is shown on their own site so always remain in control of their content.
- Parent Teacher Associations do many great things for schools – including organising fund-raising events. They are often looking for extra helpers - as well as selling tickets. Where better for them to publicise their activities than on your Local Channel site?
- In time, the IT teacher may want to incorporate posting material to the school’s own Local Channel site as part of the pupil’s basic IT skills training or as a project an after-hours computer club.

## **Local Businesses.**

Local businesses are the life blood of the community, and integral to The Local Channel. It's surprising how many businesses there often are in a community. It's not just retailers who can benefit from your Local Channel site – it's all of the “work from home” businesses too. The consultants, plumbers, builders, plasterers, and electricians seldom have showrooms, and rely on advertising and word of mouth for business. The promotion facilities available within your Local Channel site can be a great help to them.

### **What The Local Channel provides for local businesses**

1. Directory listing facility. This is free of charge – and enables the business to list what it does, and the contact details.
2. Enhanced Directory Listing. This costs £12 a year (£1 a month), and provides everything the directory listing offers, but with more details about the business, and an image (perhaps their logo). It can also be printed from the website as a postcard (for the business to leave with customers, perhaps).
3. Their own Web site, within your community site.
  - This provides the business with a presence on your “virtual” high street. They can take as many pages as they want to list their contact details, show an image or logo, detail satisfied client testimonials, price list, special offers – anything they want. It's easy for them to update and amend (and no technical skills needed).
  - A 1 page web site costs £60+ VAT for one year (£5 a month). Additional pages are a small extra charge. As with everything from The Local Channel, this includes hosting and free support.
  - The business will be given its own web address [www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/name](http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/name) which can be used on the business's own stationery.
4. The Local Channel runs a unique local coupon delivery scheme called TLC Offers which matches coupons from local businesses to shoppers who are specifically interested in that product.
  - The business only pays when the shopper prints the coupon – pay per performance.
  - And the business receives the contact details of everyone who prints their coupon along with permission to re-contact them – so even if the coupon is printed but not redeemed, the business has a valuable database of interested shoppers.

### **The benefits to a business when using your Local Channel site**

In addition to the more obvious attribute of increased publicity, the business also benefits by being seen to support its customers' community. The site can only be delivered without charge to the community through the support of businesses; so when they advertise with your community site, they directly enable the provision of the site.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### ***“We already have a web site”***

No problem – nor a reason not to have a Local Channel site. Your Local Channel site is a “high street for the whole community” – an on-line high street. So when a business has a web site within your community site, they gain a presence on your high street, and become visible to the whole community. They can easily provide “shop front” material on your Local Channel site, then link through to their existing site if they want. It's easy and cheap (£5 a month – all costs included, hosting, support etc).

***“I’m a plumber / builder (etc) not a web developer”.***

To be honest, we’re not very good at plumbing or building ... and we don’t expect plumbers or builders to be experienced at building web sites. That’s exactly why we’ve made The Local Channel easy for people who’ve never even thought of building a web site. No technical skill or experience needed – just a computer and internet access. And if anyone gets stuck ... 0800 38 986 38.

**How to track local businesses down**

There are lots of places look (exactly why having all this info on your site, in one place and always available, is a good idea!).

- Retailers are fairly easy to spot but the non-retail business is harder.
- Try the local store for those postcard ads
- The parish / community magazine / the local paper

**What The Local Channel is not asking you to do.**

We are not asking you to sell. We recognise that many Community Web Editors would not feel comfortable to do that – and we don’t ask it of you. If the business wants to buy from The Local Channel, they can do so on-line at [www.thelocalchannel.co.uk](http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk) or by calling us (free-phone 0800 38 986 38).

**But what The Local Channel would appreciate.**

- We think that the local business have much to gain from using the site – and that your site has much to gain from businesses using it. You have a community site and businesses are integral to a community. Businesses need customers; your site is where the community meet - there is a shared interest.
- So what we ask is for you to help us to make businesses aware of your site. That’s all. As individuals living and working in the community, business people want to know what’s going on just as much as everyone else does. And business people may also be involved in community organisations. So in the process of communicating the site generally, we’d just ask that you try to make sure businesses are aware of it too.

**How to approach the local business**

The Local Channel is approaching the national organisations that many local businesses belong to (their trade federations and so on), but if you can also help make local businesses aware of your own site, it would be helpful.

- We have made a number of A4 posters available for download from <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk> which you can give a local business, or post on the village notice board (also available to print postcard sized).
- The download site also has an A4 leaflet called “Introducing The Local Channel to local businesses” which contains answers to the questions a business will usually ask.

**As always, support is available at the touch of a telephone button or keyboard**

Telephone: free-phone number 0800 38 986 38  
Email: [info@thelocalchannel.co.uk](mailto:info@thelocalchannel.co.uk)  
Fax: 01722 713359

***Spreading the word.***



## Search Engines ... Search Engine *Optimisation*, and how to do it.

- The web is a huge place, which is great because there's lots of information ...but it's not useful unless you can find the information you want, when you want.
- Imagine that the 11,500,000,000+ pages on the web are actually individual sheets of paper on your desk – and you're looking for that one sheet that has the specific information that you want ... your local bus timetable perhaps. The odds are that you'll never find that sheet of paper ... and even if you did the bus would have left ages ago!
- That's where Search Engines (such as Google) come in. What they do is continually send "spiders" out onto the web to look at these 11.5 billion pages (and all the new ones) and "index" them, so that they know what that page is about. Which means that when you search for "local bus timetable", the search engine can instantly (in fractions of a second) look through its index of billions of pages, find those it thinks are most relevant to your search and give you a short summary of each page and a link to it. It is "seriously clever"!
- It presents the results in a specific order ... the closest to your search phrase first, the next closest second, and so on. Because there are likely to be tens of thousands of web pages that (to some degree) match your search, results from the Search Engine often run to 100's of pages. The reality is that most people only look at the first page or so, which is where you need your web site to appear if you want people to find you.
- The art of getting your web site to appear high up the Search Engine rankings is called "search engine optimisation" (SEO). Exactly what a spider looks for on a page, and how pages get ranked, is a secret the search engines guard closely, however;
  - Part of SEO is to do with the technical structure of the site (and we have built The Local Channel site to be very friendly to the spiders).
  - Another part of SEO is to do with what you write on the page, how you format your text, whether you link to other sites – and so on.
- We have optimised the information we bring to your site (BBC news / Thomson Local etc) because we want someone searching the web for your community to be able to find it easily.
- And you can help optimise your site It may sound technical and scary, but it isn't. It's about "how you do those things you already do", rather than "doing different things".
- There are two types of SEO – called "black hat" and "white hat" (think of black magic and white magic!).
  - Black hat is where you try and *fool* the spider into returning a high rank for your page. If the search engine thinks that is what you're doing, it will stop its spiders visiting your site and your site won't be presented in its results even if your site contains relevant information. The Local Channel does not condone black hat SEO.
  - White hat SEO however, is where you try and *help* the spider recognise what is relevant to a particular search. It is perfectly legitimate, helpful and the Search Engines welcome it. The more help the spider gets, the more chance there is of the Search Engine giving the site a high ranking when someone is looking for info that the site contains – and that's just "beneficial" for everyone.

## Six top tips to make your community site visible on the web.

1. Format the headings of articles using the “Heading level 1, 2, ... 5 or 6”
  - a. The spider recognises the formatting of a title to a web page, and thinks that if you’ve given the title extra emphasis by formatting it, then it must be important.
  - b. So “**heading**” will achieve a higher results ranking than “heading”.
2. Place the words that someone is likely to search for within the heading itself. Since the spider recognises headings as important, it gives more weight to words in a heading than in body text. So if your football team wins a cup game against the odds, the heading “Cor blimey!” won’t help the spider understand what the editorial is about; but the heading “Romsey Football Clubs’ Cup triumph” will.
3. The spiders recognise formatting as a form of emphasis, so **bold** *italics* and underlining in the body copy also help the spider to recognise what’s important.
4. Links to other sites are important, and two-way links give you a higher ranking than one-way links. The spider knows that if you have links to-and-from another site, then that other site thinks you have some useful content ... and useful content is what the spider is looking for.
5. The more highly ranked that the site you linked with is, the more effect it has on your own ranking. So if the BBC link to your site it helps your ranking more than if a tiny web site with neither audience nor authority were to link to you.
6. Repetition of keywords helps rankings. Keywords are those which when put into the Search Engine by someone looking for the information on your page, will match the words on your web page. So, if you want someone interested in your village football club to be able to find your page, make sure you include the name of your village and the football club in the article. And repeating them helps – but be careful;
  - a. Repetition purely for ranking purposes can easily spoil the reader’s enjoyment which is self-defeating.
  - b. If you wrote the word “hammocks” 600 times on a page, the spider – not surprisingly – would think that the page was overwhelmingly about “hammocks” and when someone searches the web for “hammocks”, your page will come high on the rankings. But, the spiders are intelligent, don’t like being conned and can differentiate between
    - i. Use of the word “hammocks” 600 times because that page was a price list for a hammock shop (white hat SEO), and
    - ii. Use of the word “hammocks” 600 times as a con just to get the site moved up the rankings (black hat SEO).
  - c. And there’s no point putting the 600 “hammock” words on another site, and linking to it so as to get the positive impact of links. Spiders are clever, and don’t often get conned, and don’t like it when they find out they have been.

The truth is that very few people really know exactly how the spiders rank pages – it’s highly complex, continually developing, commercially confidential algorithm. In fact it’s about as secret as the recipe for Coca-Cola!

But doing these 6 things helps your pages be found more easily than if you don’t.

## **The Parish or Community Magazine.**

### **The role the magazine plays within the community**

For many communities, the parish magazine is an integral part of everyday life and an invaluable source of information. Magazines take significant time, effort, and devotion to produce, and are often a great source of historic and contemporary news, views and information.

### **How the community web site can help the parish magazine**

- Most big media owners provide web sites to run alongside their main media. For example, you will frequently hear BBC radio presenters say "... for more details, go to [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)". Local newspapers reference their web site in the pages, and TV channels often promote their web address on-screen.
- Well - your Local Channel web site can be your parish magazine's own web site.
- The Local Channel has already made the (not inconsiderable) financial investment necessary to develop the technology and run your community web site - we do all of the "back of house" work. Within your site, the parish or community magazine can create their own modern web site, capable of rivalling that of many other media owners ... but without any of the cost or hassle.

### **Does The Local Channel compete with the parish magazine?**

No – actually your Local Channel site can be of great assistance to the community magazine. Your site is another opportunity for the Parish Magazine to reach its readers, and promote the paper version (which is exactly way that every other media owner uses their web site).

### **How would the parish magazine use the community web site?**

To provide information that seldom changes, such as

- Who publishes the Magazine, what its aims and ethos are, the terms and conditions, publication dates, outlets where the Magazine can be purchased, subscription details if appropriate.
- To provide guidance to advertisers on the advertising format and rates; and to guide contributors on article length, photograph format, copy deadlines, etc.
- Contact details for the many people involved in creating a parish magazine
- And of course, to appeal for more contributions, subscriptions or helpers.

And also to provide the information that changes more frequently

- Perhaps a summary (or the first paragraph) of articles running in the current magazine) to entice web visitors to buy the magazine to read the full article.
- Or conversely, to cover articles that there wasn't room for in the magazine.
- For items that are time-sensitive, but have cropped up in-between issues.

Who to talk to.

- The easiest way of all is to buy a copy of the parish magazine if you don't already have one – and all the contact details will be in it.
- We've made available a 1 page A4 leaflet called "Introducing the Local Channel to the community magazine" available at <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk> which you can give them to help explain how The Local Channel can assist the magazine.

## Posters & leave-behinds.

### A4 and postcard sized poster for:

- Community organisations
- Businesses

How you use these is up to you of course – but they could easily be pinned on the community notice board and in the village hall.

### A4 leaflets which can be used to introduce The Local Channel to

- Council members
- Community organisations
- Businesses
- The community magazine

### Template press release for the local press about your web site

These can all be downloaded from <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk> but if you'd rather that we print these materials and posted them to you, we'd be pleased to do so. Please contact us on:

- Telephone: free-phone number 0800 38 986 38
- Email: [info@thelocalchannel.co.uk](mailto:info@thelocalchannel.co.uk)

## Local Press.

The local newspapers are a really important source of local information – and are keen to know what's happening in the communities they serve. A new web site for your community is exactly what they want to know and write about. So we've drafted a template press release that you may want to use when contacting the local media.

### The objective of talking to the local press

To let your community know they now have a web site that they can all use.

### Tracking down a journalist

The local paper lists the people to contact in every edition – you want “editorial” of course.

### Top tips for writing a press release

- Short and clear
- The more of your words the journalist can use, the less editing they have to do – and the more they prefer it. It's not that journalist's are lazy ... quite the opposite, they tend to be busy, and with constant copy deadlines. So the more time you save them, the more they appreciate it.
- Summarise the reason for the press release in the first sentence or two.
- Use a descriptive heading rather than a clever but ambiguous heading.
- Include your contact details.
- Use a short summary to describe what The Local Channel is and does (the template includes a standard description of The Local Channel which may help).

## Summary of the support material available for the Web Editor.

1. Each page in the Community Engagement Plan can be printed separately and handed out.
2. Posters (A4 and postcards) which can be displayed locally announcing The Local Channel
  - a. To the community
  - b. To clubs / groups / teams and societies
  - c. To local businesses
3. Leaflets that introduce The Local Channel and can be given to
  - a. The council
  - b. Clubs / groups / teams and societies
  - c. Local businesses
  - d. The parish magazine
4. Demonstrations (available from <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk> ). These demonstrations are screen-by-screen video and voice-over explaining and showing you “what to click, and when”). They currently include:
  - a. How to register
  - b. How to set up an organisation on TLC
  - c. How to log in
  - d. How to add a webpage / home page
  - e. How to add a diary event
  - f. How to add News
5. PDF manuals (also from <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk> ), and including:
  - a. How to register
  - b. How to set up an organisation
  - c. How to set up your community site
6. Support available
  - a. Telephone: free-phone number 0800 38 986 38
  - b. Email: [info@thelocalchannel.co.uk](mailto:info@thelocalchannel.co.uk)
  - c. Fax: 01722 713359
  - d. Downloads : <http://tellmeabout.thelocalchannel.co.uk> (leaflets / posters, manuals etc)
7. COMING – links store of useful place to go for info. e.g.
  - a. How to apply for a lottery grant
  - b. Where to get info on “quality parish” status.

## Future development of The Local Channel.

### Proposed new items

#### Local Photo Store

A place for residents to load pictures of the local area that you could use on your site and can be shared with the internet community. This will be moderated ensuring only suitable material is loaded.

#### Community Phone Box

A feature of the site where the most useful emergency community contact numbers are stored. Police, Plumber, Gas, CAB etc. This would probably link to a verified trade register to ensure only qualified and licensed companies are shown.

#### Knowledge store

A place for hints and tips on all aspects of using The Local Channel. Perhaps including general tips for using a PC such as setting up short cuts, useful help with windows software and the internet.

#### Web or Pod casting

Live and interactive audio/video broadcasts (Webcasts) over the internet. This could be a special event in your area or even an important village meeting that you want everyone to be able to see.

#### On-line storage facility

A means and place to store documents on the internet. This enables you to reference the items on your website and can act as a backup facility for the text on your pages.

#### Local Image Library

Similar to the Local Photo Store but a place for Web Editors to locate pictures that can then be used on the site without the need for separate hosting facilities. You will be able to keep them private or share them with the internet community.

#### Simple Survey Facility

A means to conduct simple local surveys to find out what is important to the residents.

#### Links Store

The ability for people to submit useful links to The Local Channel, which we would verify and make available to any community.

#### Forum/Bulletin Board

A place for you and your residents to chat, raise issues and solve problems.

#### Neighbourhood Watch

At a glance obtain the latest information and crime statistics in your area. Neighbourhood Watch administrators will be able to use the community webpage as a means of posting information or use the feeds from central Police sources to help their valuable efforts.

#### Amber Alert

A Newsflash in targeted areas or nationally - for example to publish the details of missing children.

