

Rebuild of Brenchley and Matfield Website

Website Charging Policy

Recommendations

1. When the Parish website was established in 2008, charges were established for certain types of website listing/advertising. The website group has reviewed these and recommends that the website should no longer impose any charges. Specifically the group proposes:

- i. That community groups should continue to be listed and to submit event/activity advertising in the 'news and events' section without charge; and that local businesses (defined as Parish-based or located in adjoining areas eg Paddock Wood) should also continue to be entitled to free listings.
- ii. That local businesses should no longer be charged for including a website link in their listing details.
- iii. That there should be no commercial or personal advertising in the 'news and events' section.
- iv. That non-local businesses should not normally be listed on the website but that the webmaster should have discretion to allow free listings if the products or services offered appear to be of particular relevance to local residents.

Discussion

2. Since the Parish website was first set up, there has been general agreement that it primarily represents a service for local residents (and, to an extent, visitors) and that it should not be designed as a revenue-raising project. On that basis, existing arrangements which allow the free listing of community groups and local businesses should continue, as should the free advertising of community group news and events in the 'news and events' section.

3. However, should we charge for anything or just simplify administration by turning the website into an invoice-free zone? And, if we do that, what are the implications for the services for which a charge has been made in the past? Current website policy is supposed to apply charges in three instances: for publishing a website link in a business listing; for allowing commercial advertising on the 'news and events' pages; and for listing businesses which are not locally-based.

4. The concept of applying a charge for inserting a website link into business listings seems outmoded these days. A business's website is now often an integral part of its contact details. While some businesses were prepared to pay for this in the early years of the Parish site, there has not been any revenue from this source since 2013. The website group believes, therefore, that website links should be part of the free business listing - where businesses want one.

5. Commercial advertising in the 'news and events' section has never been a significant revenue-raiser but we have done it from time to time. For example, The Poet used to advertise special events (Mother's Day lunches, etc) and Curling in Kent used to take space to advertise the beginning of the curling season each autumn. There have also been a number of instances where businesses enquired about advertising but lost interest when told they would have to pay. There has been no revenue in this category since 2016. Free commercial advertising could lead to an influx of requests and, if it did, would clutter up the 'news and events' section and increase administrative effort. It would also make it more difficult to prohibit personal advertising which we have never allowed (ie the Gumtree-type ads which we now see on the Matfield Facebook page). In summary, therefore, the group believes that we should not allow any commercial advertising on the Parish website, apart from the business listings.

6. Finally, the charge for listing non-local businesses has never really been operational. In the early days, non-local businesses which advertised in Roundabout could be listed free but this was administratively cumbersome for both the webmaster and the Roundabout editors and that link ceased to operate some years ago. We have had some requests for non-local listings but none were ever pursued once they were told there would be a charge. We could allow such listings free of charge in future but this would have to be at the discretion of the webmaster as there have been a number of requests in the past from businesses with no local connection and of dubious reputation. In the view of the website group, the best solution would be to have a policy which simply states that local businesses (Parish-based or in the adjacent area, eg Paddock Wood) are entitled to a free listing and makes no reference to any non-local listings. This would then allow the webmaster discretion to allow requests for other listings if they seemed to be relevant to local residents.

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