



Bishop Middleham
& Mainsforth

Bishop Middleham Parish Council

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document will be posted on the Council's Website www.bishopmiddleham-pc.gov.uk and copies of this document will be available by contacting the Parish Clerk via email parishclerk@bishopmiddleham-pc.gov.

DOCUMENT CONTROL	
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Next Review	April 2028

Introduction

This policy sets out Bishop Middleham Parish Council's commitment to openness, transparency, and compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). The Council recognises the public's right to access recorded information and is committed to making information available unless there is a lawful reason to withhold it.

Purpose and Scope

This policy applies to all recorded information held by the Council, regardless of format, including paper and electronic records. It covers information created or received by councillors, employees, or contractors in the course of Council business.

Legal Framework

This policy ensures compliance with:

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- ICO's Section 45 Code of Practice (2018)

Responsibilities

The Parish Clerk is the designated FOI Officer. All councillors and staff must:

- Understand their responsibilities under FOIA
- Respond promptly to requests
- Protect personal data in accordance with data protection legislation

Publication Scheme

The Council maintains a Model Publication Scheme, making key information routinely available on its website. The scheme is reviewed annually.

Making a Request

Freedom of Information requests must be made in writing (including email or other written electronic communication) and must include the requester's name, contact address and a description of the information sought. Requests for environmental information may be made verbally under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, and the Council will provide reasonable advice and assistance to support such requests.

Requests should be sent to:

Parish Clerk, Bishop Middleham Parish Council
c/o The Village Hall, Front Street, Bishop Middleham, County Durham, DH17 9AJ
Email: parishclerk@bishopmiddleham-pc.gov.uk

Responding to Requests

Requests will be acknowledged within 3 working days

A full response will be provided within 20 working days

If an exemption applies, the Council will explain the reason for withholding information

If a public interest test is required, the deadline may be extended by a further 20 working days

Fees and Charges

The Council may charge for disbursements (e.g. photocopying, postage) in line with FOIA regulations. If the cost of compliance exceeds the statutory limit (£450), the Council may refuse the request or invite the requester to narrow its scope.

Refusing a Request

Requests may be refused if they are:

Vexatious or repeated

Exempt under FOIA

Exceed the cost limit

Internal Review

If a requester is dissatisfied, they may request an internal review within 40 working days. The review will be conducted by the Chair or a nominated councillor and concluded within 20 working days (or 40 in exceptional cases).

Record Keeping

The Council will maintain a log of all FOI requests and responses for monitoring and reporting purposes. Personal data will be redacted in accordance with data protection laws.

Training and Awareness

All councillors and staff will be offered training on FOIA and data protection as part of their induction and ongoing development.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or in response to legislative changes.