General Thoughts on Wordpress and its Implementation

This document assumes that you have some knowledge of Wordpress, possibly through having a quick "dabble" or simply by reading some background material on the web.

Wordpress.com versus Wordpress.org

Wordpress.com acts as the host for your website(s). Many users will use the vanilla-flavoured platform which it provides. No changes are allowed to the Wordpress software and no plug-ins can be installed. Any changes to the supplied themes tend to be limited to relatively simple customisations, e.g. font changes, and often only if you are paying for the Wordpress.com premium plan.

Wordpress.org allows you to download the Wordpress software and selected themes to your own hosted platform. The advantage of this approach is that you can modify the software and the themes. It also allows you to install third-party plug-ins to provide additional functionality where they are required. The disadvantage is that you are responsible for applying updates to the software, themes and plug-ins. Most importantly, it is your responsibility for ensuring that any changes work in your environment. For example, a plug-in may have worked with the previous version of Wordpress, but not with a newly installed version.

Choosing a theme

It is recommended that you read the description of each theme to understand precisely what it offers. Factors which may affect your choice of theme include:

Widths of sidebars and main content areas. Different themes typically employ different widths for these areas. In the main, they tend to be fixed. Some widths may not be suitable for you. If a sidebar is not used then the page layout may look unsatisfactory. For example, Twenty Fourteen (the theme used by Sunningdale Parish Council) does not look at all impressive if the left-hand sidebar is not used. Some themes offer a full-page template on selected pages, i.e. sidebars are not displayed on these pages and the main content uses the full width of the page. For example, see some of the histories on bkthisandthat.org.uk where the emphasis is put solely on the content.

Responsive Themes. A responsive theme's layout adjusts to your device's screen size. It provides an optimal viewing experience, easy reading, and accessible navigation on mobile phones, tablets, laptop and desktop computers. In Wordpress, sidebar(s) may be shown separately on devices with smaller screens. The four bar icon (shown below) is used to toggle between these "mini" screens on smaller devices. Older Wordpress themes tend not to support responsive themes.

Header image. Each theme will specify the size of header image that it expects. If you cannot supply an image of that size you may discover that the image is unsatisfactory when displayed.

I have wasted hours trying to get an image to display satisfactorily. One alternative approach may be to stitch several pictures together into a single image that is roughly the required size. See the SADGA site for an example. Of course, this assumes that you have the necessary tools to do such stitching.

Fonts. Each theme uses its own default font and set of font sizes. Some themes allow you to choose a different default font. For example, Penscratch employs a light font which some people can find difficult to read. Fortunately, it does allow you to change to a darker font.

Background Colours. Once again, some themes will let you choose from a range of background colours.

Themes that are heavily image-orientated. While they may look impressive, ask yourself if you have a ready supply of images to satisfy them, not just now but into the future.

Premium Themes. You may have to construct two or three pages before you decide if a theme is suitable. Unfortunately, premium themes do not permit this luxury. You have to pay for them before you get a clear idea of their suitability. So, the message must be 'beware'.

Changing Themes

It is possible to change a theme. However, when you customise the new theme it is probable that you will lose some or all of your previous settings, depending on the differences between the two themes. Obvious examples are the header image and the widgets. It is recommended that you make a note of your existing settings before changing the theme.

Theme changes that I have personally implemented have taken less than one hour to complete.

Wordpress Accounts, Sites and Users

You can have multiple sites attached to a single Wordpress account. To add a second (or subsequent site) - log into Wordpress and click on My Site(s) .. you will find that you can add another site by clicking on the Add Wordpress function.

While the number of sites that you have is totally up to you, I suggest that you have at least two: your target website plus a test site where you can try things out before implementing them.

You will need to decide how many users you want to have access to each site and what level of access they will be granted. The simplest approach is to limit it to one user per site. However, you may wish to allow certain individuals to write blogs, i.e. articles, but not allow them to publish them on the website.

Wordpress Site Plans

There are four plans: free, personal (£36), premium (£85 per annum) and business (£250 per annum). These are 2017 prices.

https://store.wordpress.com/plans/ provides the full details.

The free plan provides 3GB of storage which is probably enough for a typical public-facing website unless you start showing videos. If you want to have your own website name (called a domain name) rather than the Wordpress-generated name it will cost a modest sum of money to do the domain mapping, as it is called - £11 per annum if you already have a domain name or £15 per annum if you do not. Once again, these are 2017 prices.

The main disadvantage of the free plan is that Wordpress will put adverts on your pages. The personal plan gives you 6GB of storage and ensures that no adverts appear. Premium plans additionally allows CSS customisations which may well be useful, domain mapping (as mentioned above), 13GB of storage and direct email support. Sunningdale Parish Council has a premium plan, primarily to stop adverts. It also makes use of the domain mapping and CSS Customisation.

Wordpress Site Settings

There are a whole host of settings. I will limit myself to two important areas.

Site Visibility (Reading Settings) allows you to encourage or discourage search engines, or even to specify that you are a private site.

Discussion Settings. The main options here are to decide whether you want to allow individuals to post comments on your content or not. Given the propensity for people to write unconstructive comments, and even to attempt to hack a site, it is probably safer not to allow comments. You can always request that people provide feedback by filling in a form which is emailed to you, and hence does not appear on the site. Beware that settings here only affect future posts and pages. They are not retrospective. This means that you will have to apply said settings to each individual post / page that had previously been created.

Posts versus Pages

A website can be limited to either posts (blogs) or web pages. More typically, it will include both. Posts are often items which are created and are seldom changed thereafter. Individual posts remain on the system forever unless you delete them.

Web pages are usually subject to periodic alterations over time. However, any content which is removed will be lost unless you somehow make explicit provision to retain it.

Sunningdale Parish Council uses posts only for news and articles. The majority of the content is implemented on pages. One news post is created each month. The idea behind articles is that they will be written by individual councillors on topics of interest.

Widgets

Widgets provide useful items of functionality, the results of which are displayed in the sidebars. Wordpress.com currently provides over forty discrete widgets.

Wordpress has something called shortcodes. They can be thought of as function calls or API calls. Appropriate shortcodes can be invoked from within a text widget. Examples include the lists of recent news and recent articles in the left-hand sidebar of the Sunningdale website plus the Contact Me form in the sidebar of emmakingbarrister.co.uk.

Mandatory Functionality

"Contact Us" should ideally consist of: a (Google) map showing where the office is; the office address; hours of business; optionally, email address(es); and a form that users can fill in to ask questions or provide feedback. Contact Us can be implemented in a separate web page or as widgets in a sidebar.

It is a legal requirement to state your cookie & privacy policy.

Wordpress Editor & Some General Formatting Notes

The editor operates in one of two modes, visual or text. The vast majority of editing will be done in visual mode where what you see generally corresponds to how the rendered page will look on the website.

If you need to enter any html this has to be done in text mode. Not that on some themes text mode may in fact be called html mode. Text mode may also be useful where Wordpress appears to generate excessive blank lines which are difficult to get rid of in visual mode. Switch to text mode and delete the necessary blank lines. Note that blank lines may also appear as " ".

Some general notes on formatting issues follow.

Displaying formatting icons. There are two lines of formatting icons on both the posts and pages screens. If you can only see one line then click on the "toolbar toggle" icon to display both lines.

Line spacing. Pressing the return key results in double spacing on posts and pages. To achieve single spacing press shift and return.

Extraneous space lines. Occasionally, when you insert a double line space (by hitting return), Wordpress can generate an extra double line space at the end of the following original paragraph. Visually check to see it has done this, and (obviously) delete this extraneous line spacing.

Copying and pasting from other applications. There are two editing modes in Wordpress, visual and text. When you are composing / editing posts or pages you will normally be in visual mode. However, note that if you paste text from another application, e.g. Microsoft Word, the formatting (fonts *et cetera*) will also be carried over. The way to avoid this is to switch from

visual mode to text mode and then perform the paste operation. Switch back to visual mode to perform any necessary formatting, e.g. line spacings. Another method is to click on the "paste as text" formatting button (2nd row, 5th item) in visual mode. Any pastes that are carried out when this button is on will remove the formatting.

Image sizing. Medium images are 300 pixels wide and large images 600 pixels wide. Medium can often be too small, while large may be too big if the width of the content area is reatively narrow, e.g. on the Twenty Fourteen theme. A happy compromise may be to select custom size and set the width to 450 pixels.

Auto hyphenation. Some Wordpress themes are by default set up to hyphenate words at the end of a line. This includes the twenty fourteen theme which is used by the council at the date of writing. However, the decision to implement hyphenation is actually taken by the browser when it is displaying a page. For example, Google Chrome does not hyphenate even if the feature has been enabled in Wordpress, but Internet Explorer and Apple browsers do implement it. This hyphenation feature can be turned off in Wordpress by using the following CSS Customisation (only available in the Wordpress premium plan)

```
 /* Turn off hyphenation */
p {
-moz-hyphens: none;
-ms-hyphens: none;
-webkit-hyphens: none;
hyphens: none;
word-wrap: normal;
}
```

Books

There are a range of books on Wordpress. I bought *Wordpress – The Missing Manual*. In addition, *Professional Wordpress: Design and Development* seems to get good reviews. Both books are arguably unsuitable for the majority of non-techies.

Use of External Resources

There are a number of software companies who specialise in Wordpress. A simple Google search will show such outfits in the SE.

Support Forums

It is recommended that you make use of the various Wordpress forums if you encounter a problem or require advice. I have found them very helpful.

There are two main links: Wordpress.org support forum and Wordpress.com forums.

BK
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