



Report to the Annual Parish Meeting held on 25th May 2021 by the Chair of Fittleworth Parish Council

Introduction

This report covers the second year of the Parish Council which was elected in May 2019.

This is my first year as Chair of the Parish Council and what a busy and challenging year it has been. As we have navigated the pandemic, the village has worked together as whole to protect the most vulnerable members of our community and I would like to thank everyone of you, for the part you have played in this. We have seen acts of kindness and examples of people working together, alongside an increase use in our lovely open spaces that have been heart-warming – Thank You!.

As I review what this has meant for me, I would like to start by thanking Chris Welfare, my predecessor as Chair for his hard work on the Parish Council, putting us in a good position for what lay ahead of us in 2020/2021. I was delighted that although Chris was stepping down as Chair, he decided to remain on the Parish Council as his knowledge and expertise has proved invaluable, in helping me navigate my first year as Chair.

In May 2020, Ed Brookfield decided to step down and I would like to thank him for his work on the Council for the year he was Councillor particularly around matters relating to Insurance. Ed continues to support the local community as a volunteer on the Hesworth Common Working Group.

After a bit of an absence we were delighted to welcome Sally Tanner as full Parish Council member in December 2020. Sally had been doing sterling work on the Traffic Working Group for some considerable time, heading up the Speedwatch Team and agreed to be co-opted onto the Parish Council as we move forward with our Traffic Calming plans.

Due to the Covid Pandemic all Full Council and Committee meetings have been held virtually via either Teams or Zoom and councillors have adapted well to the new medium, although there have, on occasion been technical challenges, which we navigated with good humour, with the added benefit of villagers being able to join us from their homes for items of public interest like the development on Limbourne Lane and concerns about the closure of our lovely Swan Inn.

We are however looking forward to returning to full face to face meetings on the 21st June 2021, government guidance permitting. Attendance at monthly Council meetings (May 2020 to April 2021) was as follows: Chris Welfare, Mike Allin, David Brittain, Tony Broughton and I were present at all 11 meetings, Lee Scott at 10, Kerry Coughtrey and Robin Dunstan at 7, and Sally Tanner at 5. Our Clerk, Louise Collis, was present at all meetings.

We are also grateful for the frequent attendance of Janet Dunton, our West Sussex County Councillor, and Alan Sutton, who has been the Chichester District Councillor for Fittleworth Ward for the past year who have provided help and support in getting issues resolved, as well as Nick Billingham and Jess Chambers our PCSOs.

Going forward, so that we have time to create a Parish online presence as well as other issues that need greater input, we agreed at our Annual Parish Meeting on the 4th May 2021 that would trial a new approach for the next year. This will see:

- A slightly reduced number of Parish Council Meetings (we will not have meetings in July, December, February and April)

- The creation of a Finance & Resilience committee with delegated powers that will meet in the months where there is no full parish council meeting and will prepare the Annual budget for agreement at the full parish council meeting December
- The disbanding of the Engagement, Community Resilience, Crime & Youth Committee – which has not met for the past year and whose areas of activity will either have been addressed at the full Parish Council and/or be considered at one of the other committees or working groups
- The creation of a Community Working Group which will work with all groups to progress the revamp of the Sports Pavilion with representatives from all interested/affected parties
- The formation of a Maintenance Working Group that will coordinate day to day maintenance work that needs to be done within the village and use volunteers to get things done in a timely manner.
- Continued circulation of E-Newsletter, which has been well received, in addition to regular contributions in the Parish Magazine, Sussex Local and updates about important items on NextDoor.
- The Coronavirus Working Group will continue to meet if required and monitor the situation in case our approach to keeping the village safe needs to be changed or adapted.
- The Swan Working Group, set up during the course of the 2020/21 will continue to meet and work with any new landlords of the Swan Inn to help make a success of any re-opening.
- All other committees and working groups will continue as before

We shall review these arrangements in May 2022, to see if they have been effective.

Finance

As usual, our November meeting was devoted to deciding on our budget for the next financial year (2021/22). We decided on a 12.5% increase in our precept (from £25,080 to £28,215). This increase although lower than in the previous year was still necessary to be able to maintain our reserves at the recommended minimum level while continuing to meet necessary expenditure. Expenditure in 2020/21 was higher than anticipated due to the need to convene extra meetings as result of the pandemic and the introduction of the E-Newsletter which have taken up additional clerk time. We were able to finalise and sign off the budget at the January meeting.

Under an agreement with the Countryside Stewardship Scheme relating to Hesworth Common (which started in 2013), we shall continue to receive £2,400 a year for 10 years from Natural England and will be looking to explore other sources of funding as this comes to an end.

We have £9,861 grant funding from Operation Watershed to renew the culvert which goes under the road in Little Bognor, north of the hamlet and for work to the stream and trash screen in the ditch running along the Recreation Ground on the boundary to High Trees.

Donations made by the Parish Council

Every year the Parish Council makes some small-scale grants, called s137 payments, to local charities/ organisations on your behalf. As we have not reviewed the recipients for a little while, this year we thought we would ask you who you would like us to support and so we would like your feedback on this:

This is a summary of the donations we have made over the last 2 years – please let us know what you think and whether there are any others you would like us to consider:

S.137 payments	2019/20	2020/21
Air Ambulance	£100	£100
Burton & Coates PCC	£100	£100
Fittleworth Over 60s club	£150	£150
Fittleworth PCC (includes £50 for Village Magazine)	£300	£300
Fittleworth Playgroup	£100	£100

Community Minibus Association	£100	£100
Petworth Nursing Home	£50	£50

Planning

Able chaired by Lee Scott, supported by councillors David Brittain, Mike Allin Tony Broughton and Jane Claxton, the Planning Committee had a heavy workload in spite of the pandemic. Meeting virtually and joined by members of the public on numerous occasions, their work is summarised in the table below and included the extension to the village shop and the complex development of 14 houses along the Fleet which was approved by the SDNP planning committee with the detailed planning consent being agreed in March 2021.

This development has generated some strong feelings in the village including the request for a FOI (Freedom of Information Request) from a Parishioner which generated a great deal of extra work, which I would like to thank members of committee alongside the Clerk for responding to within the statutory deadlines which are extremely tight. Concerns centred around flooding and traffic speeds along the Fleet. The Parish Council have commissioned a Flooding report at a cost of £1,250 +VAT from a drainage consultant which will be used to support any requests for additional flood mitigation measures and have been successful in securing a contribution of an additional £4,000 from the Developer which will be used for traffic calming measures which are currently being explored alongside any CIL contribution, anticipated to be around £25k which will be used for wider community initiatives.

Just to reinforce the fact that the Parish Council has an advisory role in the consideration of any planning applications – the adjudication for most routine applications is carried out by CDC on behalf of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) – but they do take our views seriously. The adjudication of major proposals, such as Limbourne Lane, is retained by SDNPA.

	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
New Applications	77	70	74	56	30
TCA (Tree in Conservation Area) Applications	18	12	17	11	10
TPO	3				
Parish Council objections in Year	15	10	10	15	8
Applications refused	1	2	9	11	1
Applications Withdrawn	8	5	12	8	4
Appeals		4	2		
Enforcement Investigations		1	1		
Applications still in progress – awaiting comments from Committee at 30th April	3	2	9		

Lee and his colleagues are to be congratulated on coping with this high level of activity.

All applications have been considered by scheduled (and subsequently minuted) Planning Committee meetings. The public are invited to attend these, and a number of applicants have done so.

Working Groups and Representation

There are a number of less formal groups working in specific areas. They do not have the power to take decisions; any proposals are taken to the full Council for ratification. These working parties offer the opportunity to spend more time on specific issues than would be possible in a full Council meeting. Active working groups have been:

- **Human Resources & Staffing Committee** – Chaired by me and supported by Chris Welfare and David Brittain, we have undertaken the Clerks' Appraisal, reviewed the Clerk's salary, working arrangements and explored ways of reducing the Clerk's work load which has increased significantly during 2020/21 and made recommendations to the Full Parish Council
- **Hesworth Common Management Committee** – Under the chairmanship of Mike Allin, this group has continued to manage the 100 acres of the Common owned by the Council; it has organised several working days for volunteers (mostly from Worthing and via South Downs, with a small number from the village), and liaised with the SDNPA and has organised the delivery of a new sign, funded by the SDNPA (with a small contribution for the Parish Council) and a infilling of major pot holes in the car park..
- **Communications Working Group**– consisting of the Clerk, Margaret Welfare, and Kerry Coughtrey has continued to supervise and update the village website and Facebook site which were set up in 2016/17. This year we have set up a presence on NextDoor and introduced a regular Newsletter and they are all widely used to publicise village activities. Netwise, the website hosting and support provider has had some issues this year as their client group has expanded and we are exploring whether this needs to be reviewed as the working group will formally take responsibility for IT issues in the coming year.
- **The Traffic Working Party** chaired jointly by Sally Tanner and Cristine Parker supported by Jane Claxton, Tony Broughton, Lee Scott and Charles Clarke (a parishioner) have been working hard to move things forward. A grant application to the Safer Roads Trust was submitted in October 2020 which although unsuccessful was instrumental in Fittleworth being selected to be part of a Traffic Calming Pilot Scheme being run by the SDNPA in conjunction with 2020 Consultants.

A site meeting with all parties took place on the 11th May when a large number of traffic calming measures were considered, these will be now be reviewed by the consultants in terms of practicality/deliverability and costed out. One scheme will be fully funded and delivered by the SDNPA, with ongoing support being provided for other measures. We shall be consulting with the village as to which scheme they would most like to support and then being looking to attract funding for the others, so we can start to make a real difference to the traffic issues in our village.

The Working Party is also responsible for the Winter Maintenance Plan which follows the model recommended by WSCC; they deliver bags of salt to a contractor chosen by us, and the contractor distributes the bags around the village (on our instructions) when severe weather threatens. Another mild winter meant that we did not need to invoke the plan.

- **Swan Working Group** chaired by Wade Holden, a parishioner supported by Cllrs Lee Scott and David Brittain and other members of the community has had a number of meetings and liaised with Enterprise Inns as the future of our lovely pub is being decided. We have recently been told that a 10 year lease has now been agreed, which is great, and the working group will continue to work with the new landlord.
- **Coronavirus Working Group** comprising Jane Claxton, Chris Welfare, Revd David Crook, Mick Foote, Alison Welterveden and the Clerk met virtually weekly, during the critical months of the pandemic to ensure that the village stayed safe and services were provided to the most vulnerable members of our community and continue to liaise on a regular basis to see if any arrangements need to be reviewed.

Parish Councillors, who are all volunteers, regularly attend a range of meetings organized by Chichester District Council, West Sussex County Council, the Police and the South Downs National Park Authority. These meetings can be very useful – we learn about District- and County-wide initiatives, and have the opportunity to put forward the village's viewpoint.

Assets and maintenance

The Council's Asset Register consists of a long list of items for which we are responsible, and for which maintenance is needed from time to time. Activities have included:

- Mowing of recreation ground - Grasstex, the contractor appointed at the start of 2012 to mow the 3.5 acres of grass, and carry out other regular work in the village, have continued to perform well. It had been the intention to undertake a tendering exercise for this work in late 2019, but the pressure of other work made this difficult. Their contract was extended to cover 2020 and will be retendering this in 2021.
- Maintenance Working Party coordinated by Tony Broughton with repair being done by Robin Dunstan and other volunteers has now been set up to try and spread the load and ensure any repair work to our assets is completed in a timely way.
- Trees within the village are regularly monitored and necessary works arranged by Mike Allin, our Tree warden to ensure that they remain safe and in good condition.
- Footpath maintenance & litter picking undertaken by councillors as required.
- Regular Health and Safety inspections have been carried out by councillors on all the public areas for which the Council is responsible, particularly the playground and its equipment.

Other activities

The defibrillator –installed outside the Village Hall in November 2013 has still to be used in an emergency, but is checked regularly, and batteries replaced when required. The supplier (Heartsafe) is no longer operating its monitoring service for the network. The Fittleworth defibrillator is now registered with the team working with the South East Coast Ambulance Service.

The Sports and Social Club has been in a difficult financial position for the past year or two and has been paying a reduced rent to its landlord, the Parish Council. We are continuing working with the Club to draw up plans to revamp the facilities and provide a more comprehensive community resource and secured the services of an Architect who is prepared to draw up some plans free of charge, which we hope to share with the village shortly. We need to make sure that the issue of parking, a concern for a lot of villagers is addressed as part of this.

This year we have updated our Strategic Plan for the village to give a new look and feel having completed a number of objectives within it so it will guide the Council in allocating its resources and energies over the following five years. The updated version can be seen on our website.

<https://fittleworth-pc.org.uk/home-1/strategic-plan/>

BT Telephone box

We have been working to get this back as a fully functioning telephone box and getting a facelift in this prominent part of the village. We are delighted to report that it is working properly and is due to be repainted spring / summer 2021 by BT.

Thank You

I would like thank ALL of you for your help in making Fittleworth the wonderful place it is to live, but particularly I would like to say a big thank you to my fellow councillors who are all volunteers who work long hours to help us do the best we can for you with what is a very limited budget. Finally a big thank you to our Clerk Louise who supports us in all that we do and is often the first point of contact for all of you

Jane Claxton

Chair, Fittleworth Parish Council

May 2021