

# **Report to the Annual Parish Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022 by the Chair of Fittleworth Parish Council**

## **Introduction**

As we go into the final year before re-elections in May 2023, this report covers the third year of the Parish Council which was elected in May 2019.

Having now completed what has been a very busy second year as Chair, I am struck by how much the Parish Council does, often behind the scenes and I wanted to say a huge Thank You to all my fellow councillors and our Clerk for all the hard work they do which is often unseen and sometimes, unappreciated.

In May 2021, the emergency government measures allowing us to have virtual meetings came to end and so we returned to face-to-face meetings in the Sports & Social Club. We have raised the issue with our MP Andrew Griffiths, as we have found that more villagers attended virtual meetings than attend face to face ones and it would be nice to have the flexibility (legally) to be able to do both if we wanted to. Apparently, this is an issue with all councils across the country as legally (based on legislation from the 1900s) we have to have all of our meetings face to face, which really is not very 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We are advised it is something that will be considered by Government in due course, when time allows. We had a high level of Councillor attendance at all meetings and were fully quorate on all occasions.

As stated in my last Chair's report in 2021/22, we trialled having fewer meetings, as statutorily we only have to have 4 a year, but we found that we needed our regular monthly meetings (apart from August and December), because there was so much going on and so will be returning to this in 2022/23.

In June 2021, one of our longstanding Councillors, Kerry Coughtrey stepped down as she and her family moved to a neighbouring village. A huge thank to Kerry for all of her hard work whilst she was on the Council. She provided sterling work on our communication approach, revamping our strategic plan and helping us with traffic issues alongside supporting the Parish Council in all of our day-to-day work.

In September we met with the Chief Constable, Jo Shiner and some of her colleagues and had a walk around the village, sharing our concerns around traffic which she was very supportive of and which we have been able to use to support our case with West Sussex County Council and the SDNPA.

In October sadly our lovely longstanding Clerk, Louise Collis, who provided sterling support to the Council during a very difficult time, coordinating covid updates, sending newsletters to villagers to keep people in the loop as well as the myriad other duties she undertook, left us for pastures new. I would like to formally thank Louise for all her hard work and wish her all the very best in her new role.

On the plus side, Celia Price, an excellent locum clerk stepped into the breach and guided us through, providing excellent support in the interim until our wonderful new Clerk, Rachel arrived with us in January 2022. She has been mentored by Celia and has done lots of training has already introduced a new RBS finance package, which automates a lot of work that had to be done manually on spreadsheets previously and has sorted out email system which was causing some difficulty – Welcome Rachel and thank you Celia!!

We were also delighted to welcome Wade Holden onto the Parish Council in April 2022. Wade had been part of the Save our Swan working group, liaising with the owners, Stonegate (Enterprise Inns) about what was happening and being the lead in putting together the Asset of Community Value application and launching the petition which currently has nearly 2,000 signatories.

We are also grateful for the frequent attendance of Janet Duncton, our West Sussex County Councillor, and Alan Sutton, who is the Chichester District Councillor for Fittleworth Ward, who have provided help and support in getting issues resolved, as well as Nick Billingham our PCSO. Alan in particular has helped us out, at short notice, on a number of things – Thank you Alan.

We welcome residents to our monthly meetings and encourage anyone interested in joining the Parish Council to contact the Chair, Clerk or any of the Councillors to learn more about our work, especially as we approach the next Election in May 2023.

## Finance

We started work on the budget early this year as we knew Louise would be leaving us and at our November meeting our budget for the next financial year 2022/23, was agreed, which included provision for the additional traffic calming measures we wish to put in place. To achieve this, we decided on a 12.5% increase in our precept (from £28,215 to £31,742). Rachel, our Clerk will give further details of expenditure during 2021/22 in her financial update but despite a number of challenges around having to do unbudgeted additional tree works we have come in on budget, which we are pleased about.

## Planning

Chaired by Lee Scott supported by councillors David Brittain, Mike Allin Tony Broughton and Jane Claxton, the Planning Committee has continued to have a heavy workload and like the main council meetings is back to face-to-face meetings, with members of the public joining for specific issues. A summary of applications is given in the table below.

They have also been doing a lot of work around Drainage in the village particularly in respect of the Limbourne Lane development and have employed drainage consultants and liaised with both the SDNPA and Chichester District council drainage officers to ensure our concerns are addressed and covered as part of the planning conditions for the site.

We were also pleased to be able to influence the Developers in respect of street and house names of the new development along Limbourne lane, so they will be using the names of people who had a strong connection to the village for example, the Development itself will be called Hawkins Field.

As has been said before, the Parish Council has an advisory role in the consideration of any planning applications, Pre-applications and consultations – 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.

	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
<b>New Applications</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>TCA (Tree in Conservation Area) Applications</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Parish Council NO objections</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>41</b>			
<b>Parish Council objections in Year</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Applications refused</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Applications Withdrawn</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appeals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Enforcement Investigations</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Applications still in progress at 30/4/22</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	

A big thank you to Lee and the Planning Committee for all their hard work and commitment, meeting every 3 weeks, with Agendas posted on the website in advance and minutes taken by a member of the committee and also posted on the website.

## 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 Jane Claxton and supported by Chris Welfare and David Brittain, we have undertaken the Clerks' Appraisal, reviewed the Clerk's salary, recruited the new Clerk and made arrangements for the interim Clerk cover.
- **Hesworth Common Management Working Group** – Under the chairmanship of Mike Allin, this group has continued their excellent work managing the 100 acres of the Common owned by the Council; it has organised several working days for volunteers and getting the new sign in the car park installed.
- **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. We use our presence on NextDoor to highlight particular items of interest to villagers.
- Following the issues, we have had with Netwise (for our emails) we are now using a company called Cloudy IT, recommended by our interim clerk, which is proving much more satisfactory, although we still use Netwise to host our website as they provide a good service in this area.
- **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 continued to work hard to improve traffic in our village. A SID (Speed indicator device) has been purchased and the locations for which have now been agreed and will be erected in the coming months. Data from the installation of speed strips will be used to support our TRO (Traffic Regulation Order) to reduce the speed limit from 40mph to 30mph along the Fleet. Quotes have been obtained for village gates and this will be progressed during 2022/23. We continue to work with the SDNPA on the Traffic Calming Pilot and the Speed watch team continue to monitor speeds and send out letters to perpetrators and the group have achieved a reduction in lorries going through the village following approaches to the CEOs of offending firms.
- **Finance & Resilience working Group** – under chairmanship of Jane Claxton supported by Mike Allin, Tony Broughton, David Brittain and the Clerk this group, with delegated powers, met in the months where there were no formal Parish council meetings to agree any necessary expenditure and other financial matters. They also looked at the budget for 2022/23 in some detail before submission to the full council in November. With the return to monthly Parish Council meetings in 2022/23 this group will no longer be required.
- **Swan Working Group** chaired by Wade Holden, initially a parishioner, and as of the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022, as a coopted Councillor 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. In the early part of 2022, we were advised by Stonegate that they were proposing to put the pub on the market as negotiations with the latest prospective tenants had fallen through, with a closing for bids of the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022. An Asset of Community Value (ACV) application was submitted to CDC on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 2022. Our thanks go to Wade Holden for his extensive work on this, liaising with a number of organisations in the process and also Pulborough who submitted a successful application for the Oddfellows arms and to District Cllr Alan Sutton for his help and advice. They will continue to work with any successful purchaser.
- **Coronavirus Working Group** comprising Jane Claxton, Chris Welfare, Rev'd David Crook, Mick Foote, Alison Welterveden and the Clerk was disbanded when restrictions were eased.

- **Flood Resilience working group** chaired by Mike Allin supported by Tony Broughton and other parishioners looked into the impact on flooding in the wider village and fed into the Planning Committee.
- **Jubilee Working Group** chaired by Julie Hawkins supported by Nicky Cooke, Sally Tanner, Gillian Deal, Rachel Gorvin and Jane Claxton have been working hard to put together a programme events to celebrate the Queen's silver Jubilee in June 2022, which have been widely publicised but include a Tea with the Queen, a village fete, competitions, an evening celebration and the installation of Jubilee Planters (funded by donations from the village, for which a big thank you) by the Millennium Arch next to the Swan

Parish Councillors, who are all volunteers, regularly attend a range of meetings organised 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:

- Asset Register - Tony Broughton has put together an excellent register of all our assets together with photos and coordinates work in this area. A big thank you to Tony for pulling this together.
- 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 2021 but the departure of our outgoing clerk and pressure of other work made this difficult. Their contract was extended, and we will be retendering this in 2022.
- Maintenance Working Party coordinated by Tony Broughton with repair being done by Robin Dunstan and other volunteers is working well and using the new Asset register to good effect
- 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. Following a planned tree survey in early 2021 due to recent storms, a larger number of trees than anticipated required emergency work which has put some pressure on budgets. But thank to contributions from the Scouts & Guides, the Bowling Club and deferring some planned traffic calming spend we were able to cover the costs involved and will be putting additional money in the contingency for tree works going forward.
- Bus Shelter along the Fleet has been revamped, a big thank you to Tony Broughton and Mike Allin for organising and to Fittleworth Stores for giving us some off cuts they did not use in their extension.
- Footpath maintenance undertaken by councillors as required.
- Litter picking undertaken by councillors and residents, whom we thank for their contribution to keeping the village tidy.
- 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.
- Common Area outside The Swan has had a revamp by removing the tarmac and extending the grass around the Chestnut Tree which had become very neglected. This forms part of the plans to improve the public realm in this historic part of the village and big thank you to Mike Allin, Tony Broughton, Jon Edgar and Lucy Benham for all their help in this.
- Millennium Arch will be revamped by Oakmasters when they install the Jubilee Planters and a certificate of structural soundness obtained, with budgetary provision made on annual basis as designated reserves on an annual basis, for any future works

## **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 Sports and Social Club, the Village Hall and the Parish Council are now working together jointly and have come up with a list of requirements and a specification which has been passed to architects to draw up an outline plan to share with the Village for feedback. Due to planning for the Jubilee celebrations this has now been postponed until the Summer of 2022.

We have not made any charitable grants this year as we are still in the process of revising the process so the Village can have more of say in which organisations we support and will be on an application basis.

## **Thank You**

I would like to thank ALL of you for your help in making Fittleworth the wonderful place it is to live, but I would particularly like to say a big thank you to my fellow councillors, (and their families), 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 Rachel 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 2022***