

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Parish meeting held on **Friday 8th March 2024 at 6.30pm** at Fittleworth Village Hall.

Present:

Parish Councillors Allin, Broughton Claxton (Chair), Murray, MacKenzie, Houlden, Scott and Tanner.

Also present; Rachel Gorvin (Clerk) and Tom Garriock and Dom from SDNP and 7 members of the public. Cllr Janet Duncton and Andrew Griffith MP.

Prior to the meeting there was an informative exhibition of Hesworth past and future management plans, for residents to view. This included a questionnaire for residents to complete and return.

The meeting opened with a few words from Andrew Griffith MP. Andrew stressed the importance of Parish Councils to ensure local needs met and views represented. MPs represents these local residents and their needs in Westminster. Whilst Central Govt isn't responsible for everything, he will try to line up all the different agencies that have interests in any issues. Andrew holds a Surgery every Friday and residents can request an appointment via his website www.andrewgriffith.uk. He also visits schools and other community groups. His motivation is that he loves the area and wants the best for it.

1. Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Dunstan and Hazel Barkworth,
2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd May 2022 were noted.
3. Matters arising from the minutes – Cllr Claxton referred to Cllr Richardson's presentation on road safety – the new speed policy was adopted but takes time to implement. Fittleworth Parish Council is able to make reference to it when applying for funding. Cllr Scott added that noise cameras being installed shortly.
4. Report of the Chair of the Parish Council – Cllrs Claxton circulated a report on Parish council activities since the last Annual Parish meeting in May 2022.

Report to the Annual Parish Meeting held on 8th March 2024 by the Chair of Fittleworth Parish Council Summary

As we did not have an Annual Parish Meeting in 2023, choosing instead to have a Village Consultation/Information event in May around Serpent Trail Improvements and plans for the new Community Hub, this report covers two years from May 2022 to date.

May 2023 saw the forming of the new Parish Council for the next four years, following elections in May. We sadly said goodbye to Chris Welfare, the longstanding Chair, who was one of the key drivers in putting together the Neighbourhood Plan and the building of our lovely Village shop, and David Brittan who was our 'legal eagle' on the Council, informing our debates in a measured and concise way, as well providing sterling work on the Planning Committee. They are both much missed and we thank them for all their hard work and commitment. We also saw the departure of Alan Sutton, who was the Chichester District Councillor for Fittleworth Ward for many years and who we thank for all his help and support over the years. He was replaced by John Cross

The remaining Councillors – Jane Claxton, Mike Allin, Tony Broughton, Sally Tanner, Wade Houlden, Robin Dunstan and Lee Scott – were enhanced with the arrival of Kevin MacKenzie, Jon Coleman for a period and more recently Clive Murray. The work and commitment that our Team of Councillors put into their roles never ceases to amaze me, all done in their own time and as volunteers, supported by our wonderful Clerk who consistently works more than the 14 hours she is paid for to keep things running smoothly. We are extremely lucky, as a village, to have them. We are also grateful for the frequent attendance of Janet Duncton, our West Sussex County Councillor.

It has been quite an eventful two years both for our country and locally, with some notable successes and achievements:

In June 2022 we celebrated our Queens' Jubilee with a number of events and installation of the Jubilee planters at the base of the Millennium Arch beside the Swan Inn, which you all contributed to.

In July 2022 our lovely pub was bought by a local businessman, who has spent the past two years getting planning permission and renovating the building. All being well they hope to be open for business again this summer- we wish them well.

In Feb 2023 the locations for the 6 SID (Speed Indicator Device) sites were agreed by West Sussex County Council and we had these up and running in different locations in the Village by March and they have had a significant impact on reducing traffic speeds through the Village, which is great news.

In May 2023 we had our Community Consultation/Information event to tell you about the Serpent Trail improvements we had submitted a grant application for, and to share our thoughts on the new Village Community HUB. We were delighted with the turn out – more than 100 of you came – and you were very supportive of what we were trying to achieve.

In July 2023 the houses in Hawkins Field went on sale and we were advised by Worthing Homes that the Affordable Housing was being made available to local residents, some of whom have since taken up occupation.

In September 2023 – Our lovely Queen sadly died, and a number of events and services were held around the village to mark her passing.

In October 2023 – The Village Hall Trustees, The Sports & Social Club Committee and the Parish Council agreed to form a joint working party to move to next steps in terms of finalising the plans, submitting planning permission and generally moving things forward and £10k was made available by the Parish Council to support this.

In November 2023 – the Whirligig sculpture in front of the shop, kindly donated by the Thornhill family, was installed. Thanks to Jon Edgar, Mick Foote and Graham Martin for making this possible.

We also agreed our budget for 2024/25 which resulted in a small increase in precept of 16p/week for a Band D household.

In December 2023 - We got the new Village Gates in place, following a lot of hard work by the Traffic Committee, a big thank you to them for everything they did to get these over the line.

In January 2024 (A bumper month)– we received notification that we had been successful in securing £100k of funding to improve the Serpent Trail crossings throughout the village, which is

fantastic news, and we shall start working with the relevant authorities to get these in place in the coming months.

We had a great first meeting of the New Community HUB Working Group on the 9th January – Thank you to all of you who were able to attend. We had representation from the Village Hall, the Sports & Social Club, the Village Shop, the School, Chichester Community Development Trust and the Parish Council.

There was general agreement that the plans, which the Village approved in principle in May 2023, were a good starting point although they will need re-working to take into account the feedback that has been received.

What we did agree however, is that whilst the main entrance point for accessing the building by car would be moved to the back, there would also be a pedestrian/disabled access round the front coming down from the shop via a designated walkway. We would also be looking to manage the whole building as one, rather than separately, as is currently the case and are looking at the practical and legal requirements that would enable this.

We shall be commissioning West Sussex County Council Safer Road Partnership to do a traffic flow analysis, as one of the things we are anxious to improve is the traffic management during key drop off and pick up times at the school. The Car park will also be enhanced, so it is not just a slab of tarmac, with a better more attractive, permeable surface and plantings with consideration of appropriate screening to protect the High Trees development at the back. We shall be seeking the services of an expert to help us with this.

Funding is also looking positive. The Parish Council have already agreed £10k from the CIL money received from Hawkins Field, with further funding from the Sports & Social Club and the Village Hall to get things off the ground. The representative from Chichester Community Development Trust was fairly confident that we could access a further £250k.

In February 2024 we heard that we had been that we have been successful in our CHS (Community Highways Scheme) application which means that we can now work with them to reduce the speed along the Fleet from 40mph to 30mph and put in two proper crossing points by the bus stop and opposite the Hawkins Field Development, and WSCC have already been in touch with them about putting this in place.

We also heard we had been successful in our application for a Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship Grant from the Rural Payments Agency towards Heathland Restoration (an endangered habitat) on Hesworth Common

In March 2024 we said goodbye to the old Hesworth Common Management Committee, subsequently the Hesworth Common Working Group, comprising Mike Allin, Tony Broughton, Chris Welfare, Hazel Barkworth and representatives from the National Park, who have done an absolutely fantastic job in managing our lovely Hesworth Common for nearly 40 years, supported by helpers and volunteers. We would like to say a huge thank you to all of them for their hard work, cutting down bracken, clearing brambles and a myriad of other things over that time. They have built the foundations and put the Common in good shape to use the Countryside Stewardship funding that we have been successful in securing.

We welcome the formation of the New Hesworth Common Management Committee, comprising Clive Murray, Kevin MacKenzie, Wade Houlden, Hazel Barkworth, a representative of the National Park and another villager. They will be drawing up plans to be agreed by the full Council on how to spend the Grant money in line with the application.

If you want to know more about the work that has been done over the past 40 years on Hesworth Common, and the work that will be taking place over the coming years, please look at the displays around the Hall.

So, all in all, I think you would agree, quite an eventful 2 years and that is just the highlights!

Finance

The budget for 2024/25 was agreed at the end of 2023. To allow for inflationary costs and to cover the costs of potential tree works resulting from the tree survey this year, and ensure we

had the necessary reserves in place we decided on a 12.5% increase in our precept from £35,674 to £40,133 per annum. Rachel, our Clerk, will give further details of expenditure during 2022/24 in her financial update.

Planning

Chaired by Lee Scott and supported by councillors Tony Broughton, Kevin MacKenzie and Jane Claxton, the Planning Committee has continued to have a heavy workload, with members of the public joining for specific issues.

As has been said before, 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.

Many of the applications the committee have looked at are for listed buildings, or those in the conservation area. There have been numerous applications from the Swan Inn and from private householders wanting to make changes to their properties. Discharge of conditions requests for Hawkins Field are still being submitted and need reviewing. The Planning Committee has commented on applications outside the parish where they feel development will impact villagers, such as the Waltham Park Road campsite and Lord's Piece Car park applications. There are many applications and notifications of tree work, which our tree warden, Mike Allin, advises on. A big thank you to Lee, the Planning Committee and the Tree Warden, for all their hard work and commitment, meeting monthly, with Agendas posted on the website in advance and minutes taken by a member of the committee and posted on the website.

Working Groups and Representation

There are several 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 resolution. These working groups offer the opportunity to spend more time on specific issues than would be possible in a full Council meeting. Active groups have been:

- **Human Resources & Staffing Committee** – Chaired by Jane Claxton and supported by Lee Scott and Tony Broughton we have undertaken the Clerks' Appraisal and reviewed the Clerk's salary.
- **Hesworth Common Management Committee** – See details of this in the summary above.
- **Communications Working Group** – consisting of the Clerk, Margaret Welfare, and a new volunteer, they continue 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.
- **The Traffic Working Group** chaired jointly by Sally Tanner and Cristine Parker and supported by Jane Claxton, Tony Broughton, Lee Scott and Charles Clarke (a parishioner), have continued to work hard to improve traffic safety in our village. Significant milestones include the installation of the SID (Speed indicator device), the installation of the new Village Gates and working closely with the Speedwatch group staffed by local village volunteers.
- **Swan Working Group** chaired by Wade Houlden and supported by Cllrs Lee Scott and other local volunteers.
- **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 feeding into the Planning Committee.

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
- 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 groundworks in the village, have continued to perform well.
- Maintenance Working Party - coordinated by Tony Broughton, with repairs being done by Robin Dunstan, Mike Allin and other volunteers is working well and always busy.
- 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. A formal tree survey will be undertaken in 2024 in line with our 3-year cycle and budgetary provision has been made to cover any works that are identified.
- Bus Shelter along the Fleet has been revamped, a big thank you to Tony Broughton, Mike Allin and Robin Dunstan for doing this.
- Footpath maintenance & litter picking undertaken by councilors 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.
- Millennium Arch was revamped by Oakmasters when they installed 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 is checked regularly, and batteries replaced when required and we are exploring putting in a replacement as there have been some issues with it in the last year.

A revised charitable grants process is now in place and can be accessed via our website or through the Clerk and this year grants have been given to
4sight Vision Support £100 Breast Cancer Charity £300 St Mary's Church £250 Fittleworth & Stopham Parish Magazine £50 The Samaritans Bognor and Chichester District £200

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 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

March 2024

Cllr Claxton gave thanks to fellow Councillors for all the work they do.

She explained that everything takes a long time, licencing, permission, design, but many things have come to fruition recently, like the SID, Village Gates and Whirligig Sculpture.

The Community Hub revamp is to bring everything under one roof. A Car Park survey was undertaken, and the idea is to make the whole space work better. FPC successfully bid for a Community Highways Scheme to reduce speed on The Fleet, alongside this crossing points to Serpent Trail. As part of the design process, school bus stops will be discussed. The Wheels are in motion, but it has taken years to get this far. FPC have also successfully secured CIL monies for Serpent Trail Access improvements, this includes several crossings and will be used as a tool to reduce speeds in the village. The Parish Council is using all these different mechanisms to

make a difference. Cllr Claxton then gave thanks to the outgoing Hesworth Common Management Group. The new Hesworth Common Management Committee will take things forward in future years. Maintenance – Cllr Broughton heads this up and many repairs have been carried out. The Millennium arch renovation – in 2022 we completed the uprights, now looking at restoring the crossbar this year. The PC agreed a new Grants and donations policy last year, this is transparent and fair, anyone can apply if their organisation benefits the residents of the parish.

Cllr Claxton invited Questions from the floor.

Cllr Allin – what's the expected opening date for the pub. Cllr Scott has been told aiming for July.

Adrian – who is the tree warden? Cllr Claxton responded that Cllr Allin been doing it for many years.

5. Financial Report from the Parish Clerk.

Fittleworth Parish Council Financial Report for Annual Parish Meeting 8th March 2024.

The Fittleworth Parish Council financial year runs from 1st April to 31st March, so full year accounts for 2023-24 are not yet available. This report refers to the 2022/23 accounts and 2023/24 accounts as at 31st January 2024.

On the 31st January 2024 we had a combined balance in our bank accounts of £84378.88. This is made up of £67481.13 of Parish held CIL money and £16897.75 of General and Ear Marked Reserves. Ear Marked Reserves are funds set aside for specific purposes. There will be further invoices to pay before the 31st March 2024, so the Reserves may be reduced.

Our Internal Auditor, Mulberry and Co, completed an Internal Audit for 2022/23 on 11th May 2023, and the External Auditors certificate was received on 22nd August 2023. No areas of concern were reported by either Auditor.

The Internal Audit for the year ending 31st March 2024 is on 7th May 2024.

Our Annual Governance and Accounting Statements and Audit Certificates and Reports are available on our website.

Any person interested has the right to inspect and make copies of the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records must be made available for inspection by any person interested. Notice of public rights are displayed on the website and noticeboard with the dates that inspections are available, this is usually in June after the Internal Audit.

Monthly Financial Reports are presented at Full Council Meetings and are available on the website.

Year End Accounts for 2022/23

In 2022/23 the Council received an income of £66360 and spent £54672. £6370 was transferred into Ear Marked reserves and our General Reserves increased by £5317.

Receipts (2022/23)

We received £66360 in income, the largest contribution of which was the precept of £31742. Grants and Donations of £22347 were received, and Licence fees and Rent income of £3360 was received from the Sports and Social Club, Bowls and Rifle Club and the Scout and Guides Group. The rent from the Community Shop, £2600, was paid to the Recreation Ground Charity, and then transferred to Fittleworth Parish Council to contribute to the upkeep of the Recreation Ground and Playground. Other income received is from investments held with the Charities Investment Fund, (Allotment for Burying Ground and Allotment for the Labouring), income from a Wayleave Agreement with SSE for Hesworth Common, and interest on the FPC and Birchwalks Wood Saver accounts.

Payments (2022/23)

Our Expenditure was £54672. The Parish Council looks after assets worth over half a million pounds, which must be maintained. These include the Sports Pavilion, the Bowls Pavilion, the Millennium Arch, the Play and fitness equipment, the Recreation Ground, Centenary Garden, Birchwalks Wood and Hesworth Common.

Our main expenditure items were.

- Recreation Ground and Play Areas - £2703 – this includes grass cutting, tree works and playground safety inspections and repairs.
- Sports Pavilion - £4671 – includes new fire alarm system installed, roof inspection and repair of pavers.
- Village and asset maintenance - £14186 – this includes renovation of the Millennium Arch, litter bin emptying, leaf clearance, hedge cutting, and tree works.
- Hesworth Common - £2940 – this includes Heathland Management and tree works and footpath maintenance.
- Admin Cost - £24875 – This includes the Clerk's wages, Professional and Consultancy Fees, Insurance, Audit Costs, Subscriptions and Training, and IT costs.

Grants awarded by Fittleworth Parish Council

Donations of £857 were made by The Parish Council in 2022/23 to organisations that benefit the residents of Fittleworth.

Fittleworth Parish Council Ear Marked and General Reserves

As at 31st March 2023, the Ear Marked and General Reserves were;

General Reserves - £12725

Playground / Recreation Ground - £345

Road Safety Costs - £5979 (To pay for installation of Posts and sockets for SID device)

Asset Replacement/Maintenance - £920

Winter Management - Roads - £500

Legal & Professional Fees - £1250

Total Cash Balance at 31st March 2023 - £21719

Please note that out of the total Cash Balance at the year-end of £21719, only £12725 is available in the General Reserve. This is 40% of the precept, down from 45.8% in 2021/22. Good practice is that a Parish Council has general reserves of around 50% of the precept, however it should never exceed double the precept. The Ear Marked Reserves are excluded in this calculation.

Precept

At the Parish Council meeting in November 2022, it was agreed that for 2023/24 the precept would increase from £31742 (2022/23) to £35674.00.

At the Parish Council meeting in November 2023, it was agreed that for 2024/25 the precept would increase from £35674 (2023/24) to £40133.

This is an increase of 12.5% per annum, agreed by Full Council to fund inflationary increases, village projects, other rising costs and to avoid our general reserves being depleted.

The precept for 2024/25 results in the equivalent Council Tax Band D charge of £73.25 per annum.

The largest variation this year from last is the receipt of £61119 CIL funds. These are held by the Parish and as set out in the CIL Regulations, can be spent on *'the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure' or 'anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area'*.

Summary of Receipts and Payments for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 to date.

	2021/22	2022/23	As at 31/01/2024
Receipts			
Precept	28215	31742	35674
Bank Interest	1	44	577
Investments Dividend	89	91	68
Pavilion Licence Fees	3600	3600	3600
Insurance Repayments	96	0	0
SSE Wayleave	106	106	106
Recreation Ground Charity	1950	2600	0
Grants Received	3400	9909	9433
Donations received	1600	12438	4906
CIL	0	0	61119
Rent Income	60	60	35
Vat refund		5769.87	8152
	39117	66360	123670
Payments			
Payroll	11492	13293	12548
Payroll Admin	79	75	45
Administration Running Cost	338	305	690
Internal and External Audit	320	719	687
Election Costs	0	0	277
Insurance	1920	2014	2247
Legal and Professional Fees	2366	5000	4520
Subscriptions	523	486	344

Training	167	35	0
Village Hall Hire	84	256	282
ICO- GDP Register	35	35	0
IT Costs	912	2233	1255
Grants paid	0	857	300
Maintenance	7793	17498	5762
Playground Inspections	0	0	465
Gas Certificate Pavilion	0	140	140
Security Lights contribution	0	0	100
Tree Work	7583	3695	3913
Tree Survey	480	0	762
Land Survey	0	0	600
Spraying	490	550	436
Leaf Clearance *previously included in maintenance	0	0	1090
Grass Cutting *previously included in maintenance	0	0	2564
Litter bin emptying	712	722	776
Operation Watershed Works	4999	0	0
Road Safety	4671	260	17937
Drainage Survey	1775	0	0
Asset Replacement	0	2410	1684
Vat paid		4089	7905
	46739	54672	67329
Net Receipts over Payments	-7622	11687.87	56341
Transfer to (-)/from(+) Ear Marked Reserves	6799	-6370	-59353
Movement to (+)/from (-) General Reserve	-823	5317.87	-3012

Please contact the Clerk if you have any further questions about the financial report.
Rachel Gorvin, Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer, Fittleworth Parish Council
Clerk@fittleworth-pc.org.uk or visit the website www.fittleworth-pc.org.uk

6. Public Questions and Discussion

A Resident raised issues with the Drains in Lower Street – WSCC not clearing them – this has been chased up by the PC. Cllr Duncton responded that there are 4000km of roads in WS, with weather we have experienced this year it has been especially difficult. Residents encouraged to report on website.

A new resident asked about potholes. Cllr Duncton responded, if they are deep enough, they get priority. Once it's got a white line around it, it means it's going to be fixed. Same problem with potholes over the entire country, not unique to WSCC. Patching machines being used that cover quite a big area, not just the pothole. Hallelujah corner has been resurfaced last month. There are a lots of road problems at the moment and the Highways team at WSCC very short staffed. About 40 vacancies, including the Head of Service and they are having problems recruiting people.

Cllr Scott ask whether there were any developments with the situation at Church Hill Pulborough? As far as Cllr Duncton is aware there is still no movement on getting agreements with landowners.

Cllr Claxton thanked everyone for coming, and advised the displays will be on the website.

Cllr Houlden thanked Cllr Claxton for her hard work and for keeping the meetings on track. This was reinforced by Cllr Duncton.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 19:17