

FINCHAMPSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GATHERING OF PARISHIONERS HELD AT 7.30PM ON WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH 2016 IN THE FBC CENTRE, GORSE RIDE NORTH, FINCHAMPSTEAD, BERKSHIRE

PRESENT: Cllr R. Cundy, Chairman.
Cllr G. Markham, Vice Chairman.

Cllrs S. Bowers, S. Bromley, W. Chapman, Mrs C. Driver, Mrs N. Jennings-Frisby, J. May, A. Pearce, I. Pittock, G. Veitch, S. Weeks, R. Woof.

Clerk – Mrs K. Dagnall
Assistant to the Clerk – Mrs A. Kent

Paul Southern, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

20 residents; representatives from local organisations including:
P. Baveystock, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC); A. Campbell, Finchampstead Allotment Association; P. Cannam, Homestart Wokingham; Inspector J. Donachy, Thames Valley Police; N. Doody, Finchampstead Park Management Committee; M. Driver, Finchampstead & California PCC; C. Fox, St James' Church; D. Kimber, National Trust; C. Knox, Wokingham Volunteer Centre; C. MacMillan, WBC; C. May, Citizens Advice Bureau; S. Morgan, Royal British Legion; R. Murgatroyd, Finchampstead Allotment Association; S. & R. Owen, Finchampstead Society; E & S Sampson, St James Church; J. Stoner, WBC; PC B. Taylor, Thames Valley Police; G. Wrigley, Finchampstead Allotment Association / Finchampstead Society.

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

Cllr Cundy welcomed everyone to the Annual Gathering and thanked all present for attending.

Cllr Cundy stated how good it was to see so many residents present, as well as representatives from several local organisations which provide services for our community, and colleagues from the Borough Council, the Police Force, and from our churches.

Paul Southern, Assistant Chief Fire Officer from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was also welcomed to the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from
L. Blackwood; T. Conlin, Berkshire Vision; Cllr D. Cornish, FPC; N. Durman, Healthwatch; D. Eyriey, Wokingham United Charities; S. Gibson, Keep Mobile; Cllr R. Marshallsay, FPC; M. Morris, WBC; S. Price, WBC; Cllr R. Rampton, FPC; Cllr A. Ross, WBC; F. Rule, Keep Mobile; K. Shakeri, Berkshire MS Therapy; Ray Sharp, Ramblers; M. Walker, Link Visiting Scheme.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GATHERING HELD ON 11 MARCH 2015.

The minutes of the 2015 Annual Gathering were agreed and signed as a true record.

THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Cllr R Cundy. Appendix A refers.

FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix B refers.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT & ARBORFIELD DEVELOPMENT

Cllr G. Veitch. Appendix C refers.

AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr Mrs C. Driver. Appendix D refers.

ROADS AND ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr S. Bromley. Appendix E refers.

RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix F refers.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Paul Southern, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Service and the Director for Service Delivery spoke about changes to the Service since 2013, largely driven by the need to ensure the long term viability of the retained duty system, the current financial climate and the reducing demand on the emergency response service.

Future priorities include education on the prevention of fires and how to deal with emergencies when they happen; ensuring appropriate fire safety standards in buildings; and opportunities to contribute to the broader safety, health and wellbeing agenda, including working with the South Central Ambulance Service.

Several questions were taken from the floor.

BUSINESS OF PARISH INTEREST

Cllr Cundy advised that the Annual Litter pick will take place in Finchampstead on Sunday 20 March 2016 and that leaflets are available. Wokingham Borough Council Consultation Documents on the Libraries Offer are also available, for return by 25 March 2016.

A number of questions and comments were taken from the floor and various points will be followed up by the Council. The Council was thanked for all of its work on behalf of the local community.

CONCLUSION

Cllr Cundy thanked Cllr Markham for standing in for him for several months in 2015, and thanked all the Parish Councillors for their hard work, all undertaken voluntarily, over the past year. The Clerk and Assistant to the Clerk were also thanked for their support and work over the year.

Those present were invited to take a copy of the Council's Annual Report for 2015/16, to view the local photographs on display, and to join Parish Councillors for refreshments.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

Chairman's Report 2015/16

In spite of its rather quaint description this gathering is a statutory requirement. We, the Parish Council, like to look on it as an opportunity to meet and listen to as many local people and representatives from local organisations as we can. It also gives the Parish Councillors the opportunity to tell you what we have been doing over the past year on behalf of Finchampstead. There will also be an opportunity for you to raise any questions or concerns that you may have after each of the committee chairs' have given their presentation.

We have had an interesting and active year, which you will hear more about when the chair of each committee speaks shortly.

I cannot neglect the fact that 2 of our councillors have left the council this last year. Councillor Lauraine Newcombe who served the Parish for many years, including as Chair of the Council and Chair of the Planning Committee, and Councillor Lisa Blackwood who was an active member of several committees. They have been replaced with co-opted councillors David Cornish and Pat Hartwell who we welcome to our ranks, I know that they have skills and experience which will enhance the work of the Parish council.

Also one of our longstanding councillors Wally Chapman is standing down this year after 50 years.... yes that is 50 years. There are elections this May so if you are interested please complete the nomination forms obtainable from WBC.

Before I hand over to the Committee Chairs I would just like to mention the Gorse Ride Estate as this will not come up in any Committee reports. The Parish Council is part of the Working Group, monitoring future plans for the possible redevelopment of the Estate. It is disappointing that for financial reasons the project is currently on hold, but we hope to see the project progress during the coming year.

I will now hand over to the various Chairs who will introduce themselves and give a brief summary of what their committee has achieved over the year and then we will take any questions or issues that you may have.

Cllr Roland Cundy

Chair, Finchampstead Parish Council

Finance and General Purposes Committee Report 2015/16

The Finance Committee includes chairpersons or representatives from all committees and is responsible for budgets, the control of finance and general governance of the Parish Council. This includes:

- Compiling the annual budget, including the requirements for Amenities, Roads and Road Safety and Rights of Way Committees.
- Recommending to the Main Council the precept to be collected for the coming year from residents by WBC with their Council tax. This year the precept has been increased by 1% (following 2 years without change) to reflect the likelihood that there will be increasing demands upon the Parish Council in times of continued austerity for local government. The precept still remains one of the lowest in Wokingham- the recent contribution which has enabled the MUGA project to go ahead is a prime example.
- Overseeing the completion of the Annual Return and Audit.
- Periodically reviewing our policies on such diverse matters as data protection, complaints, financial controls, and introduced in 2015 the Use of Social Media when the Parish Council began to use Facebook
- Managing the grant process and making grant recommendations to Main Council. In the last year we made donations to a wide range of organisations which benefit Finchampstead residents including Berkshire Vision (formerly the Blind Society), Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, CAB, Finchampstead Scouts, Keep Mobile and MS Therapy. We also make grants to local primary schools for extra-curricular activities and to FBC to support their excellent Youth Work.
- Safeguarding the Councils Assets – bus shelters, benches, streetlamps and noticeboards etc and ensuring that these are adequately maintained and insured. Also identifying and managing any risks associated with the Council’s activities. This year we are extending this work to develop a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan which will ensure that we can continue to deliver services whatever eventualities may arise. We have also taken over from the NAG the running of Finchampstead Early Response (FER) which aims to provide immediate local support to emergency services in case of natural or other disasters.
- Last year the introduction of Facebook represented a major enhancement to communication with Parishioners and we intend to develop this further in 2016 by setting up a programme of Community Consultation to ensure that the Council is truly in touch with and able to represent local views . A working group is already established and working on this.

One of the first subjects for Consultation will be managing the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Without doubt our most significant activity in 2015 was the work with WBC on how we should manage CIL. This was introduced in April 2015 and will have a major impact on how local infrastructure is funded. It is a completely new way of assessing and collecting the contribution developers make to local infrastructure required to sustain (and mitigate the impacts of) growth. The most significant change from our point of view is that Parish Councils will now receive a minimum of 15% of this contribution for any developments within the Parish. Because Finchampstead contains the part of Arborfield SDL represented by the Marino Family Trust we have been one of the three key councils involved in successfully establishing with WBC the way of managing this totally new process. I would especially like to thank the Parish Clerk, Katy Dagnall for the excellent work she has done on this difficult and complex project.

Although CIL will bring significant sums and give the Parish Council much greater influence this is NOT a pot of gold, we will not see much for at least two years and a large proportion will have to be committed to vital major infrastructure (roads and schools) projects which are under-funded. But we have already identified a number of worthwhile local projects and will be consulting extensively in 2016 to refine develop these ideas and help to prioritise them.

Cllr Roger Woof.

Chair, Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Planning Committee Report 2015/16

The Planning Committee is made up of eight councillors and is supported by the assistant to the clerk and meets monthly. It is our purpose to represent the views of the majority of parishioners, when considering the various planning applications received and as far as possible, ensure that any proposed development is in keeping and complimentary. In the past twelve months the committee has reviewed approximately 160 applications. Members of the public are welcome to attend our planning meetings and occasionally do so. This usually occurs when an unpopular or controversial application has been submitted!

There is no such thing as an average application, with many variations in the type and complexity. Currently many are for single storey extensions. An example of the more unusual is one to convert a chicken coop for use as a carport! There is a growing trend in converting garages into habitable accommodation or at the other end triple garages being built with first floor gyms & games rooms!

Our comments are fed back to the WBC Planning department who take them into account when determining the application. For the multi-home and more complex ones they may go before the Borough Planning Committee for determination. Since the middle of 2015 WBC give us a written explanation when our recommendations differ from WBC's and planning approval is given. Parish councillors occasionally attend the Borough Planning meeting in either a pro or anti role!

Some applications that are turned down by the Borough then go to Appeal. Of the 14 appeals listed in 2015/2016 7 have been dismissed, 1 approved, 1 withdrawn the others are awaiting a decision. In the cases where we have objected to the applications, we endeavour to send one of our Councillors to the hearing to speak on FPC's behalf.

With regards to Planning Enforcement, the committee works closely with the Borough Planning Enforcement team and reviews all new and existing enforcement issues at each of our monthly meetings. Whenever necessary we will chase outstanding issues up in order to ensure timely resolution and that no issue gets overlooked.

You will be aware of the major development currently underway at the Arborfield Garrison SDL site. Since our last report to you this development has made real progress and the first phase development application for 113 dwellings in the Biggs Lane area is under construction, with further phase applications expected shortly. Since the SDL is a large and complex series of developments we established a working group (FAST), to monitor it and review any plans and this group meets with the Borough council staff, councillors and the developers on a monthly basis. A Community Liaison Group (CLG) has also been established who's main role is to liaise with Crest the Developer and residents over day to day issues with the site during the development phase.

The planning application for the new road through the development, known as "Nine Mile Ride Extension", is being considered by Borough Planners. The construction of the new secondary school is progressing and the school is due to take in its first pupils for the new term starting in September, initially in temporary accommodation and from September 2017 in the new building.

The outline planning application for the southern part of the SDL known as Hogwood Farm was approved in September 2015. The legal agreement related to this approval is expected to be approved shortly. You will recall that last year we reported on a visit to Poynton in Cheshire to take a look at their "shared space" village scheme. Since then a working group has been established to address the requirements of California Cross. (Note the name!) A representative of the Planning committee is a member of the working party looking into this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their continued enthusiasm for this committee. I would of course also like particularly to thank the assistant to the Clerk, who has responsibility for the Planning Committee, for all her hard work on our behalf.

CLLr Gordon Veitch.
Chair, Planning Committee

Amenities Committee Report 2015/16

First of all, I should like to thank Geoff Markham who has chaired the Amenities Committee with enthusiasm and good humour over many years.

The Amenities Committee has a wide remit, so I will just touch upon some of our main projects. The Allotments continue to be a wonderful asset to our Parish. They are almost all in use and in spite of the wet winter, are a joy to behold!

More hanging baskets were placed around California Crossroads last year, and this year, we plan to add 2 large flower planters, one on the Red Oak corner, and one outside the Post Office.

As reported last year, oak saplings have been planted at Burnmoor Meadow, and, more recently, 3 larger oak trees were planted, which will be dedicated to the Queen to mark her 90th birthday.

Moving away from horticultural projects, we continue to improve our environment by employing Roger Long as our litter warden. Roger collects over 50 sacks of litter each month, and that is just from our main roads. It's a shocking statistic, but imagine how Finchampstead might look without Roger's efforts. We are also grateful to our Adopt a Street volunteers who help keep their local area clean and tidy.

We plan to have our War Memorial listed by Historic England. It will also be cleaned when the weather improves, and more daffodils will be planted in the autumn.

Since the last AGM, defibrillators have been installed at FBC and the Memorial Hall.

In September, Parish Councillors and volunteers from the local shops and the Police, as well as individual residents, embarked on a day-long clean-up of California Crossroads. We painted, swept, weeded and scrubbed and the end result was a noticeable improvement in the overall look of the Crossroads.

The Borough Council has announced recently that a Multi Use Games Area, known as a MUGA, is to be installed on land at the rear of the FBC centre. The Parish Council has been involved in the planning of this project for many years and is delighted that it is to become a reality. The MUGA will provide opportunities for all ages to participate in a variety of games and activities. Its use will be on an informal basis and it will not be floodlit.

And last, but certainly not least, the Queen's 90th Birthday. We plan to light the Beacon on top of the tower of St James' Church, to have a barbecue, a birthday cake and some bubbly during the early evening of 21st April. We hope to run a shuttle bus from the Crossroads to avoid having too many cars at the Church. We have informed all the local schools and posters will soon be appearing with more information, so please spread the word and come along for this historic event.

CLlr Mrs Christine Driver.
Chair, Amenities Committee.

Roads and Road Safety Committee Report 2015/16

Our committee of 8 councillors meets quarterly and works with Thames Valley Police, WBC and others to help make the Parish a safer place for residents travelling around, whatever their mode of transport. We have some limited funds of our own to support small projects and we aim to act as a liaison group to deal with residents' local issues.

During 2015/16 we have been focussing our work on 6 areas

- Improving Car Parking Options and safer routes to schools
- Monitoring traffic volume and speeds throughout the Parish
- Introducing Gateways to welcome into the Parish and remind of speed limits
- Improving the energy efficiency of Parish owned Lampposts
- Monitoring the effectiveness of flooding prevention
- Promoting Sustainable Transport

Safer car parking and routes to schools.

Last year, we advised that we were drawing up plans to re-layout the Avery Corner car park including a drop off zone and an increase in capacity of an additional 10 spaces. This work has now been incorporated into the planning for the redevelopment of the California Cross Roads, which is itself stalled until certain sections of the Arborfield Garrison planning applications are agreed. We have, however, continued monitoring the use of car parking in that area and it is our long term objective to introduce civil parking enforcement as a way of reducing abuse and congestion.

We have been monitoring parking and drop off zones around all the Primary Schools in our Parish in order to promote safer options. In Gorse Ride we successfully lobbied to extend the double yellow lines opposite the school to reduce congestion and improve crossing safety. We are investigating options for improving the protection of pedestrians in the approach to Finchampstead CofE Primary school.

Monitoring Traffic Level and Speeds

We continue to deploy our two speed data recorders (SDRs) on roads throughout Finchampstead. This enables us to keep regular records of traffic levels so that we can establish trends in the Parish and this data is now well established as a credible source of information. This year we purchased a Speed Indicator Device (SID) which further facilitates regular speed checks that we conduct with volunteers from Finch NAG. We are able to use this evidence with Thames Valley Police to issue cautionary letters.

Gateway Project

As part of our ongoing programme to mark the entrance to the Parish with a welcome and a prominent reminder of the speed limits, we introduced village gateways on entry into Finchampstead from Barkham and from Arborfield (along the Reading Road). The evidence from our programme of speed monitoring is that that Roundels and Gateway signage together have an impact on reducing speed. We now have these Gateways on four of the main entry routes into the Parish and in 2016 we are working with WBC on options to add Wellingtonia Avenue as the fifth route.

Parish Owned Lampposts

Last year we implemented a process to replace any faulty lamp lanterns in Parish owned street lights with more energy efficient LED replacements. Happily this was called on when we had to replace one of our lampposts that had been severely damaged in an accident. We are working with WBC on a programme to proactively replace the 16,000 street lamps in the Borough over the next two years with LED lighting. This will involve all the street lamps in the Parish including the 12 that we own.

Flooding Prevention

Last year we said that we were working with WBC to find solutions for the flooding on White Horse Lane and The Gallops. This work has now been completed. In general flooding across the Parish has been much improved following this and other work in previous years.

Promoting Sustainable Transport:

As part of our commitment to encourage cycling in the Parish, we have installed cycle racks at the Memorial Park in the Village to add to those at the Post Office and the California Ratepayers Hall. We are very pleased that we continue to see good utilisation of these cycle racks and we are happy to consider any proposals for other suitable sites.

Finally, I would like to thank all the Roads & Road Safety committee members and the Clerk for their continuing hard work and support throughout this year.

Cllr Steve Bromley
Chair, Roads & Road Safety Committee.

Rights of Way Committee Report 2015/16

The Rights of Way committee has had another busy and largely successful year although unfortunately two potential areas of major extension to the 26 mile network of “paths” in Finchampstead have only made slow progress since the last Gathering.

Some restoration work is taking place on the CEMEX sites on either side of Longwater Road and the huge earth “bund” on the Fleet Hill site has now been removed, opening up the view south across the Blackwater valley. The Bailey Bridge which carried both quarry vehicles and the conveyor belt over the river has also been adopted by Hants CC and will prove a valuable asset, potentially providing future access across the Blackwater to Hampshire PRoWs. However the extension to the planning application relating to both Fleet Hill and Manor Farm sites is only now coming close to being agreed following extensive work by the legal teams from WBC and Cemex. We hope that full restoration will still be completed by the 2019 target, giving access to the public and enabling the RSPB to take over the running of these sites as their first reserve in Berkshire.

Similarly we are still awaiting details of the Greenways plan developed by WBC as part of the new SDL developments. These are intended to improve access for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists between existing settlements and the SDLs and we hope will include improved access between the Village and Finchampstead North. These plans are still in consultation with landowners and have yet to be published.”

We continue to employ a part time Warden who does sterling work throughout the year and have invested in new safety equipment and a strimmer to facilitate his work. We continue to cooperate closely with WBC and other organisations like the Ramblers, British Horse Society, National Trust and local landowners to ensure that our Rights of Way are maintained to a high standard.

This has resulted in some significant long term improvements in the course of the year

The work begun in 2014 on footpath 15 near Warren Crest Farm has been completed by WBC and the Ramblers building up the bad sections of path with “planings” which has resulted in “all –weather” accessibility for the full length.

Also the long-term problems on Bridleway 11 (known to many as “the gallops”) have now been tackled. Regular flooding from White Horse Lane was alleviated by work done by WBC Highways department in Summer 2015 and after further meetings on site with Parish Councillors and the landowner Mr Bishop of Church Farm the upper part which was seriously eroded has been built up with “planings” to provide a safe and durable surface . We would like to thank Mr Bishop who did the work and WBC who provided materials and advice.

Improving access to the network remains a priority and I am pleased to report that the difficult stile near Fleet Hill Farm has now been removed and this completes the improved access to this part of the Blackwater Valley path (a National Trail).

We are also in the process of replacing two badly rotted kissing gates on FP8 (on the lower stretch towards Fleet Hill). The new gates have been ordered and the Ramblers have agreed to install them once WBC have completed the necessary searches for cables etc. We would like to thank Mr Barley of Banisters Farm for kindly contributing one of the gates.

As reported last year we continue to work on mapping and illustrating circular walks for our web site. The second walk, from Simons Wood to Moor Green Lakes returning via the Ridges, has now been added and we have ordered more of our Orange FPC waymarkers which we will install asap. A very attractive part of this walk follows the Blackwater Valley Path and I would like to take this opportunity to publicise the annual Walk the Path event organised by the Blackwater Valley Trust – an 11 mile walk along the Blackwater on 24th April. If you want to know more or book your place on the walk please go to www.bvct.org.uk

We will be adding the third walk in 2016.

Finally I would like to add my thanks to Wally Chapman who was Chairman of the Footpaths Committee – now the Rights of Way Committee - for many years. His knowledge of Finchampstead – the people, the geography and the history is amazing and has been a huge help and a great joy to all of us on the committee.

Clr Roger Woof.

Chair, Rights of Way Committee.