

## FINCHAMPSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GATHERING OF PARISHIONERS HELD AT 7.30PM ON WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2017 AT THE FBC CENTRE, GORSE RIDE NORTH, FINCHAMPSTEAD, BERKSHIRE

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

Cllrs S. Bowers, S. Bromley, D. Cornish, Mrs C. Driver, Mrs N. Jennings-Frisby, Mrs P. Hartwell, J. May, A. Pearce, I. Pittock, R. Rampton, G. Veitch, S. Weeks, Mrs S. Yorke.

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

32 residents; representatives from local organisations including:  
Peter Baveystock, Mark Morris, Catriona MacMillan, Joyce Stoner, Cllr Angus Ross, Cllr Charles Margetts, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC); Inspector John Donachy, PC Paul Bentley, Thames Valley Police; Maurice Driver, Ed and Sue Sampson, Richard Owen, Carolyn Fox, Rev and Mrs Julian McAllen, St. James' Church; Celia May, Citizens Advice Bureau; Tom Conlin, Berkshire Vision; Martin Jeater, Wokingham Volunteer Centre; Derek Oxbrough, Veteran Tree Association; Sheila Morgan, Royal British Legion; Rebecca Eytel, Arborfield Green Community Development; Patricia Cannon, Homestart; Wendy and Peter Graham, Finchampstead Society; Mr and Mrs Gordon Wrigley, Finchampstead Society / Allotment Association; Neil Doody, Finchampstead Park Management Committee; Simon Hall, Jamie Walker; Finchampstead Baptist Church; Pierre Cudin & Cynthia Mergenthaler, Queen's Oak Public House.

#### **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 familiar faces as well as new people, including residents, representatives from several local organisations and volunteer groups which provide services for our community, and colleagues from the Borough Council, the Police Force, and from our Churches.

#### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from

Cllr R. Woof, FPC; Cllr R. Marshallsay, FPC; Phil Creighton, Wokingham Paper; Andy Couldrick, WBC; Cllr Rob Stanton, WBC; Alison Griffin, Veteran Tree Association; Christine Knox, Wokingham Volunteer Centre; Sally Gibson & Fred Rule, Keep Mobile; Peter Wilford, CPRE; Liz McDaniel, Me2 Club; Lauraine Newcombe; Gerald Cockcroft; Carl Clarke.

#### **THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Cllr R Cundy. Appendix A refers.

#### **FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT**

Cllr R. Woof, presented by Cllr G. Markham. Appendix B refers.

#### **PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT & ARBORFIELD STRATEGIC 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, presented by Cllr S. Weeks. Appendix F refers.

## **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

Neighbourhood Police Inspector John Donachy spoke about the structure of Thames Valley Police which covers 3 counties and includes 2 million residents, also attracting 6 million visitors each year. The Bracknell and Wokingham Police area is the largest area in the Thames Valley.

A Local Policing Operating Model has been introduced focusing on 3 areas of Response, Investigation and Neighbourhood. Priorities are protecting vulnerable people, reducing antisocial behaviour, reducing violence, addressing substance misuse and making roads safer.

Statistics were explained, showing the generally low level of crime in Finchampstead.

## **YOUTH WORK IN FINCHAMPSTEAD**

Simon Hall, the Youth and Children Pastor and Jamie Walker the Sport and Community Outreach Worker with the Finchampstead Baptist Church gave a presentation on the range of youth work activities provided for children and young people. 14 different weekly activities are available at the FBC Centre attracting 400 children and young people each week, with around 700 involved on a regular basis.

Activities also include holiday camps and residential trips.

## **BUSINESS OF PARISH INTEREST**

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 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 2016/17, to view the local photographs and other information on display, and to join Parish Councillors for refreshments.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

## Chairman's Report 2016/17

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Every Town and Parish Council has to have an annual meeting for its Parishioners. We are not sure when the Finchampstead meeting became known as the 'annual gathering' but are happy to stay with this rather quaint description – unless anyone has any alternative suggestions.

This meeting gives us the opportunity to tell you what we have been doing over the past year on behalf of Finchampstead, and also to meet and listen to you - our residents - as well as to others who provide support or services to those in our Parish.

We have had an interesting and busy year and there are just a few points I would like to cover before I hand over to our Committee representatives who will tell you more about our activities.

You may or may not know that we have 17 Councillor places and we are delighted that we have no vacant seats.

We had a significant change in May 2016 when Wally Chapman stood down after 49 years on the Council. We awarded Wally the Freedom of the Parish – the first time we have used our power to do this, so making him the first ever Freeman of the Parish.

Following the elections in May we were pleased to welcome Sheila Yorke to the Council to fill the vacant position, and are already benefitting from her skills and experience.

Unfortunately for us Geoff Markham, a member of the Council for over 15 years and currently our Vice Chair, will be moving away from the Parish this year and will therefore be standing down. We are delighted that Geoff is here tonight, but are sad that this is likely to be his last Annual Gathering. We all thank him for all his contribution to the Council as Vice Chair, and also as former Chair of both the Finance & General Purposes Committee, and the Amenities Committee, and wish him all the very best for the future.

Moving on to another area - communications. We have always tried to keep in touch with our residents and the local community, but in recent years have really started to work harder on this important area, including raising awareness of the Parish Council and its work on your behalf.

This year we have seen a steady increase in usage of our website and our Facebook page, and our e-newsletters have a wide circulation. We have attended several events including the National Trust event in Simons Wood in May, the Village Fete in June and both of the Community and Emergency Services Fun days in August. We plan to attend as many local events as possible in the coming year.

Copies of our annual report for 2016/17 will be available for you tonight so please pick one up before you leave. This report will also be sent out to every household in the Parish over the coming weeks. If you haven't already signed up for our e-newsletter please do so.

Later this year we will be sending out a Community Consultation Survey to seek your views on the work we do, and also where future funding should be directed. Please look out for this and let us have your views.

**Cllr Roland Cundy**

Chair, Finchampstead Parish Council

## Finance & General Purposes Committee Report 2016/17

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The Finance Committee is responsible for not only all the Financial Affairs of the Parish Council but is also its General Management Committee and therefore includes chairpersons or representatives from all committees. It is responsible for budgets, the control of finance, general governance and a wide range of other activities essential for the effective running and development of the Parish Council. These include:

- Compiling the annual budget, including the requirements for Amenities, Roads and Road Safety and Rights of Way Committees. We expect that the 2016/17 budget outturn will be almost exactly on target even including an exceptional grant to the St James's Churchyard extension and have set a slightly lower budget of £137,275 for 2017/18 which, allowing for other income and use of reserves results in a precept (the amount collected by WBC from residents with their Council Tax) of £126,944 and a Band D rate of £22.17 which is only 1.8% above the previous year.
- Overseeing the completion of the Annual Return and Audit.
- Periodically reviewing our policies. In 2016 we conducted a major review of all the Councils policies and have made major updates to a number of them to reflect new legislation and good practice. We have also introduced a new Training Policy. In 2017 we plan to apply for the Foundation Level Local Council Award (introduced in 2016) as a first step in demonstrating our long term commitment to Best Practice in all aspects of our work.
- Managing the grant process and making grant recommendations to Main Council. In the last year we made donations of over £40,000 to a wide range of organisations which benefit Finchampstead residents including major support for the FBC to support their excellent Youth Work, St James's Churchyard Extension and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. Other grant recipients included, CAB, Finchampstead Scouts, Keep Mobile, MS Therapy, Berkshire Vision and Cruse Bereavement Care – a full list appears on our Annual Report. We also make grants to local primary schools for extra-curricular activities and have increased these for 2017/18 in response to a growing need even in this mainly affluent area.

FPC has been asked by representatives of Wokingham United Charities (who have significant funds dedicated to relieving hardship in Finchampstead and some other local Parishes) to help increase awareness of their activities and FPC has decided to direct any future requests for such support to WUC. Details of the charity are available from the Parish Office.

- 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. In 2016 this included restoration work on the Barkham Ride bus shelter and maintenance on two little known Parish Assets – a Red Oak planted for the Queen's Silver Jubilee near St James's Church and the Old Water Trough on Jubilee Hill.
- Securing delivery of services by finalising a Business Continuity Plan which will include a number of improvements already made particularly in the areas of data and information security. We also continue to run Finchampstead Early Response (FER) which aims to provide immediate local support to emergency services in case of natural or other disasters and provide some administrative and technical support to the Neighbourhood Action group.
- Managing the Parish Council's staff. The HR Sub Committee is responsible for all aspects of staff management including pay and conditions, performance management, health and safety, grievance

procedures and training for both staff and Councillors.

- Managing effective two way Communications between the Parish Council and Residents. We have set up a Communications and Consultancy working group to plan and direct all aspects of Communication on and off line with the aim of increasing awareness and public involvement with the work of the Parish Council. This year we have seen a steady increase in usage of our Facebook and Web sites and have attended a number of local events, including a stand at the National Trust event in Simons Wood in May, the Village Fete and the FBC fun-day. In 2017, for the first time, we plan to Send the Annual Report (which you will all receive later this evening) to all the households in Finchampstead. This reflects the huge importance we attach to improving communication with Parishioners and we intend to follow up on this by sending out a Community Consultation Survey in the Autumn to ensure that the Council is truly in touch with and able to represent local views.

Finally I would like to give an update on CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) which we mentioned last year. 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 this will be quite significant.

It is still very early days with CIL in operation, partly because of delays to the Planning Applications made by the Marino Family Trust. In October 2016 we received the first instalment of CIL payments from WBC totalling almost £30 thousand pounds together with their proposals to contribute to major WBC infrastructure projects affecting Finchampstead. We have already agreed to contribute £5000 to Improvements to the children's playground at the FBC and have indicated that we will support the Green Way Project once we are satisfied with the final plans.

As we said last year CIL will bring significant sums and give the Parish Council much greater influence but this is NOT a pot of gold since WBC is committed to vital major infrastructure (roads and schools) to support the new SDL developments and these are already under-funded. Therefore we will have to support these projects in order for them to be completed but we have also identified a number of worthwhile local projects and will have to balance the priorities over the coming years. The consultation in Autumn 2017 referred to previously will be invaluable in helping us to make these decisions in the best interests of our Parishioners.

**Cllr Roger Woof. Chair, Finance & General Purposes Committee.**

**Presented by Cllr Geoff Markham, Vice Chair, Finance & General Purposes Committee**

## Planning Committee Report 2016/17

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The Planning Committee has responsibility on behalf of the Parish Council to review and make comment on all planning applications and related matters both within the Parish and in areas adjacent to it. This includes works to trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's). The Committee of eight councillors, meets every four weeks and in the past 12 month period we have considered approximately 200 planning applications. Most applications are routine and non-controversial, often for single/two storey extensions, others are more complex and controversial. The committee tries to represent the views of the majority of parishioners when arriving at a decision.

We have noticed a continuing trend in the past year for people looking to convert their garages into habitable accommodation. Few of us still use the garage to park the car! One recent application from BT was to remove 19 phone boxes from the Borough, a couple of which were in Finchampstead. In November we received an application for temporary planning permission for the use of land for filming at the former Hazebrouck Barrack site at the Garrison. This has caused some angst from our neighbouring parishes!

Applicants unhappy with failed applications may go to Appeal and 15 new appeals were considered. An unusual example was the appeal on Broughton, Heath Ride. This proposal, for the construction of two new dwellings was turned down by WBC, went to Appeal and was allowed in February 2016. One of the points that carried weight in favour of the proposal was the 'appeal scheme proposed a 40% affordable housing contribution'. The inspector saw this is an important consideration. The inspector found that only a limited level of harm would arise to the character of the area. In December 2016 the case was re-opened. WBC having challenged the decision & the courts said it needed to be reheard. We await the outcome!

In July 2016 WBC went Paperless!, so no further distribution of paper planning applications to Parishes except for larger developments, e.g. 10 or more dwellings. As a Parish we were well prepared for this change of working since we had been reviewing plans on-line for some time before. We find the new method of working much more effective and mostly quicker.

### **Planning enforcement**

From time to time there are planning related matters that contravene Planning policy and guidelines. Such matters are referred to the Borough Planning Enforcement team for attention. We maintain a list of parish issues and review these monthly to try and ensure nothing is overlooked and issues are dealt with in a timely and effective manner. From time to time major issues are taken to court for resolution.

### **Call for Sites**

As part of the Local Plan update – 'Call for Sites', the Parish Council took the opportunity to be part of the site assessment process. A planning sub-committee was formed and reviewed and considered all 44 sites submitted for Finchampstead Parish plus a further 8 sites immediately adjacent to the Parish.

It is important to note that as part of this process, a land owner is at liberty to nominate a site for consideration as a possible site for future development. It should not be taken for granted however that such sites are going to be developed. Sites selected to be added to the final list following the initial screening and consultation process will all have to follow the standard planning application process before any development is given approval.

## The Arborfield Strategic Development Location (SDL)

Over the past year the new development at Arborfield Garrison, now known as Arborfield Green has been progressing a pace. In September, members of the Council attended a Crest Nicholson launch event to view the first phase of completed dwellings, named Waterman's View. Some may now be occupied!

The new Bohunt secondary school building, is progressing well and looking good. It is due for handover in June. The school will take up occupation of the new building in time for the new September term. As part of the on-going activities to ensure the site is developed in accordance with plans and permissions granted, the Council has a dedicated Team – FAST – which looks at all relevant matters. Members of the Team attend monthly Steering Group meetings with WBC Officers and the Developers. This enables us to put forward views and ideas and flag up any concerns or suggestions. We also attend the Community Liaison Group meetings, again with WBC and the Developers.

After a long delay the southern sector of the SDL, owned by the Marino Family Trust has finally been granted outline planning permission.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their continued enthusiasm and sense of humour. It's often needed to when you have to turn out on a cold night in January! My thanks go also to Anna the Assistant to the Clerk, who ensures that we are well prepared for our meetings and meet our deadlines.

**Cllr Gordon Veitch.**  
**Chair, Planning Committee**

## Amenities Committee Report 2016/17

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The Amenities Committee meets 3-4 times a year, though many of our projects are on-going between meetings.

Members of the committee worked closely with Wokingham Borough Council to ensure that the long-awaited Multi Use Games Area at the FBC Playing Fields was completed in time for the summer holidays last year. We are delighted to see that right from the start, the MUGA has been in constant use and is popular with children and adults alike.

Following the removal of undergrowth and dead trees, the Silver Jubilee oak near St James' Church, is looking much healthier. The old railings have been removed and the plaque is to be cleaned along with the Trig Point at The Ridges.

The War Memorial was repointed and cleaned in the Autumn, and thanks to the perseverance of the Clerk, has been granted Grade 2 Listed status by Historic England.

The Clerk has been compiling a list of Features of Local Historic Interest, which has been suggested by WBC. It is hoped that these features, which could be buildings or landscape features will then be protected through a new policy to be introduced by WBC this year.

Our seats and notice boards are cleaned and refurbished on a regular basis, and this year we have also refurbished our bus shelter on Barkham Ride, and the old water trough on Jubilee Hill.

Members of the Amenities Committee have been in discussion with WBC and Scout Leaders concerning the proposed improvements to access and parking at the California Country Park. Whilst the Parish Council welcomes some of the proposals, we are concerned about the impact on the activities of the Scout Group which is based in the Park. We continue to work with WBC and the Scouts to try to reach a satisfactory settlement.

Many of you will have seen or maybe supported the Parish Council's request to have the Queen's Oak listed as an Asset of Community Value. This means that, should the pub ever be put up for sale, which we hope will never happen, the Parish Council would have 6 months in which to put forward a plan to retain its use for the Community. This is merely a safeguard; we hope that the Queen's Oak will continue to be a successful pub for many years. We are grateful for the support which has come forward, and will keep you informed of the outcome.

The Allotments are now well-established, and thanks to the commitment of the Allotment Association, are a joy to behold and an asset to Finchampstead. More trees have been planted on the adjacent Burnmoor Meadow.

Sadly, it's not all good news. Litter continues to be a problem, in spite of the efforts of our Litter Warden. We have met with officers from WBC, but there is no magic fix. We just have to try to educate our children and I have been in to local schools to try to do just that. However, there are to be 2 Litter Picks, one on 19<sup>th</sup> March, starting from the FBC Centre and another on 26<sup>th</sup> March, centred on the Village. We are also planning another California Crossroads Tidy-Up on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Everyone is welcome at these events, so please come and join us and help keep Finchampstead looking good.

The floral displays at the crossroads are a great success and we have added to these this year. We plan to adopt the red phone box – the last traditional box in the Parish. Ideas for its use and possible relocation will be agreed when the crossroads improvements are completed. Suggestions will be welcome!



Finally, I would like to thank the very hard working and enthusiastic committee, and of course, Katy the Clerk, for her valuable support and guidance.

**Cllr Mrs Christine Driver.**  
**Chair, Amenities Committee.**

## Roads and Road Safety Committee Report 2016/17

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Our committee of 8 councillors (currently 2 vacancies) meets 3 times a year 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 2016/17 we have been focusing our work on 4 areas

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

### ***Car parking and safer routes to schools.***

The new proposed cycleway route down Nine Mile Ride to the Bohunt Secondary School has been put on hold but we continue to monitor the situation and lobby for a viable solution asap

We continue to pursue our plans to re-layout Avery Corner car park including a drop off zone and an increase in capacity of an additional 10 spaces. The agreed work is awaiting final costings from WBC before it can progress.

We are also monitoring the use of car parking in this area and we are hopeful that our plan to introduce localised civil parking enforcement as a way of reducing abuse and congestion will come into force in October of this year.

### ***Gateway Project***

We still aim to implement a gateway at the Crowthorne end of Wellingtonia Avenue. Due to the position of the existing post, a gateway sign of the same style as others would overhang the carriageway and would therefore be dangerous to high sided vehicles. Therefore, at the suggestion of WBC highways we are pursuing an offset style post and await costings from them.

### ***Parish Owned Lampposts***

Our joint initiative with WBC to proactively replace the 16,000 street lamps in the Borough with LED lighting continues. Currently the lamp columns that only need lantern replacements are being processed. Later this year the roll-out for the replacement of all the remaining units will begin.

### ***Monitoring Traffic Level and Speeds***

We continue to deploy our two Speed Detection Radar recorders (SDRs) on roads throughout Finchampstead. This enables us to keep regular records of traffic levels in the Parish and establish trends. We also use this data to identify possible Speedwatch sites where we deploy our Speed Indicating Device (SID) to perform regular speed checks which we conduct with volunteers from the Finchampstead NAG. We are able to use this evidence with Thames Valley Police to issue cautionary letters and where appropriate additional TVP checks.

A short presentation was given on traffic monitoring activities.

### ***Going Forward***

We are looking to implement a minor junction change at the bottom of the hill coming down from St James Church to improve sight lines of the traffic approaching from White Horse Lane

We are also negotiating with WBC on a study to identify options on how we can improve the safety of the War Memorial Junction.

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 2016/17

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The Rights of Way committee has had another busy and largely successful year and 2017 looks like being very exciting with two major developments beginning to take shape which will improve and ultimately extend the current 26 mile network of “paths” in Finchampstead.

The Greenways plan developed by WBC is intended to improve access for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists between existing settlements and the four new SDLs using a new all weather surface. A public consultation has now started on the Flagship route which runs from the Arborfield SDL across Commonfield Lane and then follows the existing Bridleway 46 to California Country Park. The current proposal is for walkers and cyclists to then go through the Country Park to the field behind the FBC and onto Gorse Ride North. Horse riders would continue on the existing Bridleway. The consultation closes on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March and can be accessed at <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/news-and-consultation/consultation-and-having-your-say/current-consultations/> on the WBC web site. Please do look at the proposals and give your feedback. We welcome and will support the Greenway plan in general but will be making our views known to WBC regarding the details of the proposal as part of the consultation.

RoW Committee have also supported an extension of the Bridleway network across California Country Park from Bridleway 46 to Nine Mile Ride. We understand that this has been studied as a “phase two” to the Greenway Plan and could be done as early as the next Financial Year. Again we would urge everyone to support this important link for Horse Riders between existing Bridleways in the North and South of the Parish

Further restoration work is also taking place on the CEMEX Fleet Hill site where a new path is being constructed along the edge of Fleet Copse. Plans have now been agreed for the full restoration and it is understood that the RSPB will be taking over management of this site and Manor Farm on the other side of Longwater Road. The extension to the planning application for continued extraction has finally been agreed and the target date for full restoration is still 2019. We look forward eagerly to this development which will give public access to a new network of paths and bring the first RSPB reserve in Berkshire.

The past year has seen us continue to cooperate closely with WBC and other organisations like the Ramblers, National Trust and local landowners to ensure that our Rights of Way are maintained to a high standard – overall 68% of the paths in Wokingham were rated as being in “good condition” by a Ramblers survey which is well above the national average. Some of the credit for this undoubtedly goes to our part time Warden John Alexander who does sterling work throughout the year.

In addition to the normal tasks of cutting back vegetation, removing fallen trees and repairing gates we also aim to provide significant long term improvements to year round accessibility. This is a slow process but we now have some significant results from work in recent years.

Footpath 15 near Warren Crest Farm was worked on in 2015 by WBC and the Ramblers building up the bad sections of path with “planings” this has resulted in the path being usable for the full length this Winter. Also Bridleway 11 which benefitted from drainage work and surface improvements in 2015 is still standing up well and the hedges have been flailed in Autumn 2016. Thanks to all involved.

We also conducted some drainage surveys with the help of local expert David Harthill on some notoriously wet areas of BW26 near Wick Hill and FP29 at Fleet Copse. The reports and some realistic proposals for improvements have been sent to WBC and we hope these may prove a basis for future cooperative action though the FP29 problems may already be en-route to permanent solution by the new path being made on Cemex land (mentioned above)!! Fingers crossed – we will monitor progress.

Efforts have also begun to improve some other bad areas (mostly due to bad drainage and increasingly wet weather).

Bridleway 4 near White Horse Lane has already had some ditches cleaned out by WBC, which has made some improvement, but further work is needed by BBOWT on their adjacent reserve to unblock overgrown ditches before we can build up the surface where it has become waterlogged.

WBC have also been involved with us this Winter in looking for improvements to the footpaths across Sand Martins Golf Course. Although these areas are inherently low lying and marshy we believe that with relatively minor drainage work and some building up of eroded sections the paths can be made accessible except in the most severe weather conditions.

Cooperation with Local Landowners and organisations has been instrumental in making Footpath 8 - off Fleet Hill – accessible for its entire length from St James’s Church. A total of three new kissing gates have been installed (two kindly donated by Mr Barley of Bannisters Farm) by the Loddon Valley branch of the Ramblers and we would like to thank them – in particular Ray Sharpe and David Moffatt who have led the teams involved. Also thanks to Mark Morris of WBC for his help with utility searches and ordering materials for this project. We would also like to thank Mr Bidston of Rectory Farm for the improvements made to footpaths across his land and look forward to further cooperation to enhance the experience for walkers.

As reported last year we added a second circular walk (from Simons Wood to Moor Green Lakes) to our web site and this has now been waymarked with our distinctive Orange FPC markers. Improved signage by WBC and improvements to fencing and the surface of the footpaths by the owners of Fishers Copse are greatly appreciated.

We have now also added a third walk which goes from California Country Park across the fields to St James’s Church and returns with an optional visit to Warren Woods. Waymarking of this route will be taking place shortly but you should be able to follow it from the directions and map on the website. We will be researching and adding a fourth walk in 2017 – watch for news on the web site later in the year.

In a wider context we continue to support and work closely with Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, whose support in the reconstruction of the Cemex sites will be invaluable – integrating with the overall Blackwater Valley strategy of open access along the river from the source to the Loddon. I would like to take this opportunity to mention the annual “Walk the Path” event organised by the Blackwater Valley Trust – this April I believe it will follow an exciting new route – part of the Three Castles Path which passes through the Blackwater Valley. If you want to know more or book your place on the walk please go to [www.bvct.org.uk](http://www.bvct.org.uk)

Finally I would like to thank the Committee (and other members of the Council) for their support and encouragement during 2016.

**Cllr Roger Woof, Chair, Rights of Way Committee.**

**Presented by Cllr Simon Weeks, Vice Chair, Rights of Way Committee.**