



**Finchampstead**  
Parish Council

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24





# A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Last year was challenging for the Council, in October 2023 our long standing Clerk Katy Dagnall sadly passed away. This meant that we were understaffed for the majority of the year and were not as pro-active as we have been in previous years. We have just successfully recruited a new Clerk and RFO Amanda Everett who started in April 2024.

There were successes to be celebrated, and in September our 4 year Neighbourhood Development Plan went to referendum and with a huge majority of 89.6% voting Yes, the plan was formally adopted by Wokingham Borough Council.

We continue to award grants and donations to organisations that benefit the residents of Finchampstead. Last year, we helped to fund new play equipment at two of our local primary schools and solar panels at the Ratepayers Hall.

We continue to work closely with WBC and local organisations; through working together we can make best use of resources to help maintain services and facilities for our residents. We may not be responsible for the implementation of the larger projects in the Parish, but this does not mean that we cannot influence these and we are involved with many projects from the future nature reserves in the south of the Parish to the regeneration of the Gorse Ride community.

This report summarises our work over the last year and our priorities for 2024-25.

**SIMON WEEKS**  
CHAIRMAN





## ABOUT US

Parish Councils are statutory bodies and are the first tier of local government, at the heart of the community. Finchampstead Parish Council is made up of 17 Councillors, supported by the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Planning Committee Clerk. The Council also employs a Footpath Warden and two Litter Wardens, all working part time. The Parish Councillors are all volunteers, and the Council is not political.

Our activities fall into 3 main areas; representing the local community, working with partners to deliver services and provide facilities to meet local needs, and striving to improve the quality of life and community well being. We try and work with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) wherever possible to bring benefits to the Finchampstead community, but are not accountable to the Borough Council in any way.

The Council meets monthly and has five committees which meet regularly, covering Amenities, Finance & General Management, Planning, Rights of Way, and Roads & Road Safety. We have several Sub Committees and Working Groups dealing with specific projects or activities and the Council also has representatives on a number of organisations from the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership to the FBC Advisory Board and the Gorse Ride Steering Group. Members of the public are always welcome to attend our Council and Committee meetings. For more details please visit our website [www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk](http://www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk)

# FINANCE AND GENERAL MANAGEMENT

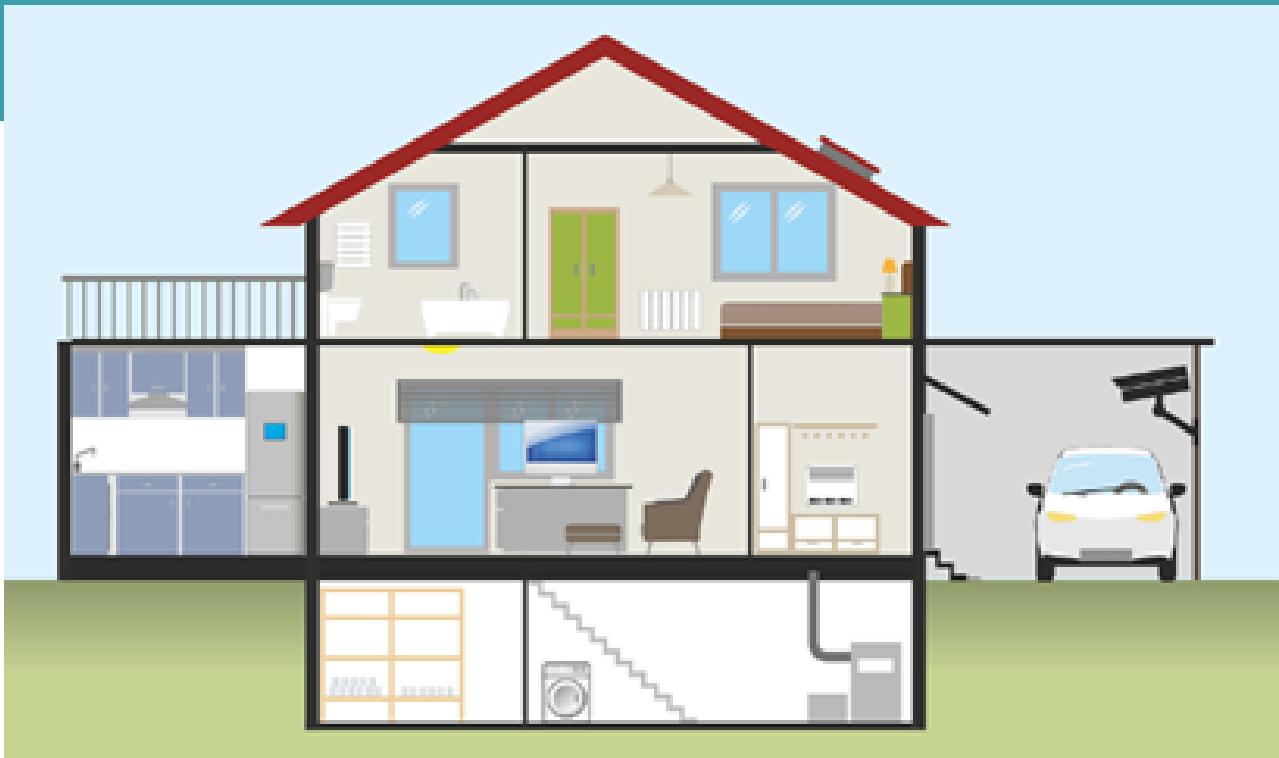
This Committee is responsible for preparing and monitoring the annual budget and setting the precept - the amount collected from residents by Wokingham Borough Council as part of the Council Tax. In 2023/24 our precept was £192,154. This meant that for the average property in Council Tax Band D, £29.32 of the annual Council tax paid went towards funding the Parish Council. Our budgeted expenditure for the year was £196,035, with the balance met from income and reserves. The Committee also leads on the overall management of the Parish Council including forward plans, policies and procedures. Our Human Resources and Risk Management Sub Committees report to the Committee, together with Working Groups covering various projects and areas of work.

**Grants and donations** - Last year we awarded over £36,395 to organisations providing support or services to our residents. Our largest donations are for the youth activity programme run through the FBC Centre, the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, Citizens Advice and Keep Mobile. Donations have also been made to our community halls, primary schools and St. James' Churchyard.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

CIL is the contribution paid by developers towards improvements to local infrastructure. This year we have contributed CIL funds to various projects including allotment enhancements, new play equipment at Gorse Ride and Nine Mile Ride primary schools, Solar panels at the Ratepayers Hall, refurbish the kitchen and accessible toilet at St James' Church, design work for the Memorial Junction improvements and the final payment for the War Memorial relocation project.





# PLANNING

WBC is the Planning Authority and makes the decisions on planning applications. However we are notified of every development application submitted within the Parish and we consider and comment on all of these. In 2023/24 we considered 139 applications, varying from home extensions to developments of one or more new homes to barn conversions. We review plans for further phases of housing at Finchwood Park. We monitor progress with the Local Plan, and respond to WBC and Government consultations. These planned local developments are bringing many new homes to the Parish. We continue to closely monitor progress, liaising with developers, the Borough Council and local stakeholders.

## **Finchampstead Neighborhood Development Plan**

The referendum took place in September. With an electorate of 10,037, 25% or 2604 turned out to vote and with a majority of 89.6% the plan was adopted.

## **Gorse Ride Redevelopment**

The 46 new homes forming Phase 1 at Gorse Ride is complete and Phase 2 residents will start to move into their homes in the Spring/Summer. Arborfield Green lies mainly within Barkham Parish but there are around 350 homes in Finchampstead. At Finchwood Park, in our Parish, 150 homes are now occupied. When complete there will be up to 1500 homes, a primary school and community facilities.

## **Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park**

Plans for the new community centre are being finalised, this centre will have a nursery, cafe and spaces available to rent. Sainsbury's has been given the go ahead at the Nine Mile Ride extension as part of a larger District centre. This will include a pedestrianised high street, public square, 18 retail units, a pre-school & day nursery, a pub, community building and 206 new houses and flats.

# AMENITIES

## Litter and Waste

Our two part time litter wardens collected 436 sacks of rubbish from our roadsides.

We have over 45 'Adopt a street' volunteers covering almost 50 roads

The annual litter pick was a great success, there were two events and lots of volunteers.

## Allotments

The allotment site was opened in 2012 and is very popular, with almost 100 tenants and a waiting list. We work closely with the Allotment Association over its management.

## Defibrillators

We have 5 community accessible defibrillators provided at:

- California Crossroads
- California Ratepayers Hall
- FBC Centre
- Memorial Hall
- St James' Church Centre

We hold two First Aid/defibrillator training sessions per year that are free for residents to attend.

## Trees and Floral Displays

The trees planted at Burnmoor Meadow – registered under the 'Queen's Green Canopy' Scheme are thriving.

We provide floral displays at the California Crossroads.

## Remembrance 2023

A fantastic parade was held at the newly relocated War memorial by the Memorial Park.

The Barkham hookers created poppies and displays for the California Crossroads.





## RIGHTS OF WAY

The committee aims to ensure that the local network of footpaths and bridleways is kept in good condition, well signed and as accessible as possible.

### **CEMEX**

In 1993, CEMEX resored former gravel pits in the Blackwater Valley creating the Moore Green Lakes Nature reserve. Completion of the nature reserves at Fleet Hill and Manor Farm is long overdue. We continue to liaise with WBC over completion, public access and legal designation of Rights of Way. Extraction operations are now complete and restoration is underway.

### **Flooding**

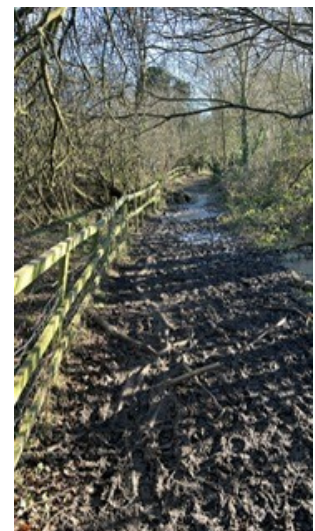
Winter 23 saw 130% of the average UK rainfall which rose to 168% in Spring 2024. Using statistics from March to February, these 12 months were the wettest conditions ever recorded in England. These conditions meant that footpaths and bridleways were flooded and impassable in some areas.

### **2024/25 Priorities**

Upgrading of Footpath 33 to bridleway standard to resolve longstanding flooding issues.

working with landowner to improve rootpath over Wick Hill

Action to rectify the persistent wet areas on Church Path.



# ROADS AND ROAD SAFETY

## Speed Watch

We continue with regular sessions and although we have had some new volunteers, we are always on the look out for new recruits! Community Speedwatch signs are installed on all of the major entrances to the Parish. Last year 36 sessions took place and 768 vehicles were reported to Thames Valley Police for exceeding the speed limit.

## Signs, Potholes and Footways

Potholes continue to be an issue in the area, residents have continued to do a great job of reporting these issues to Wokingham Borough Council.

## California Crossroads

Phase 1 of the planned works at the crossroads started in February. The project is scheduled to be completed in September 2024. This is a Wokingham Borough Council project and they continue to keep residents updated with regular newsletters.

WBC organised a day of drop in sessions for residents to meet with the project team and the contractors.





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# 2024/25 PLANS

We will continue to focus on our residents' priorities: Footpaths, cycleways and bridleways; parks, open spaces and play areas; roads and road safety schemes.

Improved engagement with residents.

Investing of CIL funds to provide or support local infrastructure and protect our green spaces from development.

**24/25 Priorities include:**

Gorse Ride regeneration

Finchwood Park development, and community facilities at Arborfield Green

New nature reserves and rights of way on land at Fleet Hill and Manor Farms

California Country Park lakeside improvements

Collaborative working with WBC on plans for the old War Memorial junction

Challenging inappropriate development proposals

Improving the condition of our roadsides and pavements

Planting and protecting trees

Monitoring progress with the California Crossroads improvement scheme

Supporting local schools and other organisations with appropriate projects that benefit the community



Finchampstead Ridges