

FINCHAMPSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GATHERING OF PARISHIONERS HELD AT 7.30PM ON WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH 2018 AT THE FBC CENTRE, GORSE RIDE NORTH, FINCHAMPSTEAD, BERKSHIRE

PRESENT: Cllr R. Cundy, Chairman.
Cllr S. Bromley, Vice Chairman.

Cllrs Mrs C. Driver, Mrs B. Eytel, G. Jukes OBE, R. Marshallsay, J. May, A. Pearce, I. Pittock,
G. Veitch, S. Weeks, R. Woof.

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

34 residents; representatives from local organisations including:
Angie Gibson, Jennie Grieve, Cllr Angus Ross, Cllr Charles Margetts, Wokingham Borough
Council (WBC); Maurice Driver, Finchampstead and California PCC; Tom Conlin, Berkshire
Vision; Wendy and Keith Graham, Finchampstead Society; Mr and Mrs Gordon Wrigley,
Finchampstead Society / Allotment Association; Neil Doody, Sue Napper, Bev Kemp,
Finchampstead Park Management Committee; Jim Gallagher, Finchampstead Baptist
Church; Tonia Elliot, St Eligius Church; Vicky Curtis, The Greyhound; Peter Bowsher MBE, MS
Therapy Centre; Christine Knox, Wokingham Volunteer Centre; Jo Mason, Link; Lauren
Baker, Arborfield Green Community Development; Ellen Tims, Barkham Parish Council; Sally
Gibson, Keep Mobile; Al Campbell, Finchampstead Allotment Association; Steven Polak,
Wokingham Job Support Centre.

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, our Churches and local businesses.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from
Cllrs S. Bowers, D. Cornish, Mrs N. Jennings-Frisby, R. Rampton, FPC; Peter Baverstock, Joyce Stoner, Mark Morris, WBC; Peter Wilford, CPRE; Ray Sharp, Ramblers; Karen King, Finchampstead Brownies; Liz McDaniel, Gemma Pearce, Me2 Club; Dennis Eyrie, Wokingham United Charities; Jim Laphorn.

THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Cllr R Cundy. Appendix A refers.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Reports were presented by representatives from each of the Councils Committees. The slideshow presentation is included as Appendix E, additional reports are included as noted below.

AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr Mrs C. Driver. Appendices B and E refer.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT & ARBORFIELD STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Cllr G. Veitch. Appendices C and E refer.

RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix E refers.

ROADS AND ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr S. Bromley. Appendices D and E refer.

FINANCE & GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix E refers.

ISSUES WITH THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Cllr Weeks spoke about the current issues with the UK planning system and how these affect Wokingham Borough.

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS

Mike Coates spoke about the Society and its potential involvement with the nature reserves being created at Fleet Hill Farm and Manor Farm. Habitats to attract specific birds and wildfowl are being created, along with a network of paths including bridleways.

OPEN FORUM

A number of questions and comments were taken from the floor and various points will be followed up by the Council.

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 2017/18, to view the information on display and to join Parish Councillors for refreshments.

Chairman's Report 2017/18

Every Town and Parish Council has to have an annual meeting for its Parishioners. This meeting – our Annual Gathering – gives us the opportunity to tell you what we have been doing over the last year on behalf of Finchampstead. It also allows us to meet and listen to you - our residents, as well as to others who provide support or services for those in our Parish.

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

You may or may not know that there are quite a few of us on the Council – in fact we have 17 Councillor places. Some vacancies have arisen over the last year and we were delighted to welcome Becky Eyle to the Council in June, and most recently Graham Jukes who has been with us for less than two weeks. Most of the Councillors are here tonight – as well as those here at the front there are several in the audience - could I ask those Councillors to stand or make themselves known.

We have very recently had a resignation and as a result do have one vacancy on the Council. We have just started to advertise the vacancy and hope to co-opt a new Councillor in April. If any of you are interested please contact Katy for an application form.

Chairmans' summary presented after the Committee reports

As you have heard this has been a year of challenges and opportunities. You have heard about the challenges around local housing development, the progress with the Arborfield Strategic Development Location and also about the start of the regeneration of the Gorse Ride Estate. At the same time the Community Infrastructure Levy funds provide us with a real opportunity to direct funds to priorities which are important to you, our residents. We have listened to your views put forward through our household consultation, and will be building these into the strategic plan we have started to develop for the coming years.

Simon has spoken about the challenges facing the Borough Council. A positive which may come out of this is the opportunity for closer partnership working between ourselves and the Borough.

We will continue to listen to and communicate with you, our residents and are looking forward to an exciting year ahead working on your behalf.

CLlr Roland Cundy
Chair, Finchampstead Parish Council

Amenities Committee Report 2016/17

The Amenities Committee meets 3 or 4 times a year, though many of our projects are long term and on-going.

We continue to monitor Wokingham Borough Council's works at California Country Park. The improvements to roadways and parking are underway, and the next phase will be the redevelopment of the café and surrounding area. The Parish Council is keen to retain the rural feel of the park and will be in discussion with the Borough as to how this can be achieved alongside a much needed up-date of the facilities. We have particularly requested that toilet facilities will be open for longer hours than at present, and we would like to see reduced parking charges for those who, for example, may wish to exercise a dog for a short time...

We understand that the Borough Council plans to replace the boardwalk before the summer and will do what we can to ensure this happens.

The Parish Council continues to support the Scout Group in its attempts to secure a lease from WBC on the Scout Hut land. We have approached the interim Chief Executive of the Borough and asked for resolution of this issue.

Since the last Annual gathering, two more Defibrillators have been installed; at the California Ratepayers Hall and St James Church Centre. These were funded by a grant from Scottish and Southern Electric. We have arranged a defibrillator training session for 27 March – places are still available and you can sign up tonight if you wish.

Many people will have noticed that the telephone box at the Crossroads has a new name. The Parish Council adopted the box last year and our handyman refurbished it to provide a Book Swop. It's a novel way of recycling!

Unfortunately, the Crossroads, and indeed much of the Parish, continues to suffer from litter, and near the shops, a general air of untidiness. The Parish Council recently approached shop owners and asked whether they would be prepared to contribute towards a regular tidy-up of the forecourts. Unfortunately, the response from most, but not all, of them was negative, so we shall continue with our Parish Council Clean-ups, which are usually supported by the Co-op and Red Oak Stores. The next Clean-Up will be on 22nd April at 9.30am. Everyone is welcome to come and help!

Our Litter Warden, Roger Long, continues to collect huge amounts of litter from our main roads. 100 bags in January. The Annual Litter pick will take place on 18 March from The Greyhound or the FBC Centre. Refreshments are provided. Another way to help keep us tidier would be to volunteer to "Adopt a Street". You'll be provided with a litter-picker and will take on an area, probably near where you live, to keep as tidy as possible. Please phone the Parish Office for more details.

Residents may have noticed that the grass around the War Memorial grew rather tall last year when our regular contractors were no longer able to cut the grass, and we had to find a replacement. This proved to be quite difficult, but eventually we succeeded and hopefully, the grass will look better this year.

We do have plans for the coming year and I would like to mention some of these.

Our Allotment Site continues to thrive. There are now over 75 plots in cultivation and only one or two vacancies. In conjunction with the Allotment Association, we plan to provide more car parking and to extend the water supply at the southern end of the site. Discussions on extending the leases are on-going.

You may be aware of the Broadmoor Hospital siren located on our allotment site – although you won't have heard it for a while as it has not worked for some years. The West London Mental Health Trust has been reviewing its sirens and has decided to remove this one – it was taken out last Friday. While we will not be sorry to see it go we have asked if we can keep the actual siren.

We have been looking into the history of Warren Wood for some time and would like more people to know about this important site, and particularly its bronze age bell barrow, a Scheduled Monument. We will be publishing some information about the site very soon.

Which brings me to plans for the Commemoration of the end of the First World War 100 years ago in November. The 11th falls on a Sunday this year, so in addition to the usual Remembrance Service at 3pm at the Memorial, there will be a concert at St James Church, with the Military Wives Choir from Arborfield. This will be followed by the lighting of the Beacon and a Peal of Bells at 7.0pm with some mulled wine provided by the Church. All is still at the planning stage but full details will be available nearer the time.. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their hard work and the Clerk for her invaluable help and support.

CLlr Mrs Christine Driver.
Chair, Amenities Committee.

Planning Committee Report 2017/18

The Planning Committee has responsibility on behalf of the Parish Council to review, consider and make comment on all planning applications and related matters, both within the Parish and in adjoining parishes. The Parish Council are “consultees” and as such do not make the final decision, this is the responsibility of the borough planning committee. We also review tree works proposed to trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO’s).

The Committee of 7 (8 including RC) councillors, meets every four weeks and in the past 12 month period we have reviewed approximately 182 planning applications. Most of these applications are routine and non-controversial, often for minor changes or extensions; others are more complex and controversial. When considering applications the committee tries to represent the views of the immediate neighbours and the majority of parishioners.

Unsuccessful applicants may Appeal the decision and 17 new appeals were considered. When such appeals result in a public enquiry, the planning committee will normally attend and may speak at the hearing, which is chaired by a government inspector from the Planning Inspectorate.

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. The parish council maintains a list of parish issues and reviews these monthly through to resolution in order to ensure nothing is overlooked and that issues are dealt with in a timely and effective manner. From time to time major issues are taken to court for resolution.

Perhaps the most controversial issue dealt with this year has been the receipt of unwelcome planning applications from developers for large scale and unplanned housing developments in the parish. You will be aware no doubt of the applications concerned; Finchampstead Road (in Wokingham town) 250 homes, Land adjacent to Sand Martins 80 homes and a SANG, Land off Longwater Road, 40 homes and Land off Johnson Drive, 25 homes.

All of these applications are opportunistic, having been submitted in order to try and take advantage of the perceived failure by WBC to demonstrate they have a 5 year land supply. WBC has in fact authorised over 9500 homes which are yet to be built!

Working with WBC on this issue, the PC has formally written to the housing minister, the minister of state for local government and communities and the prime minister. We have raised the key issues and attempted to highlight the apparent lack of fairness in the planning system. Those of you who are on the parish council’s e-newsletter distribution list will have seen our update on these rather complex issues which we published in our December newsletter. (copies available tonight if you haven’t already seen it.) You can be assured that your parish council will continue to treat this issue with the utmost urgency. We share the concerns of parishioners with regards to over-development and the resultant impact on our parish, its roads and its precious green spaces.

The Local Plan update

WBC is currently updating the local plan for the period to 2036 and you may recall me mentioning last year the phase known as “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. We have subsequently reviewed the Finchampstead sites with WBC who are now working through the feedback for the borough and will announce the results later this year.

Gorse Ride Estate Regeneration

In the last year progress has been made with plans to regenerate the Gorse Ride Estate. We have representatives on the Steering Group for this important project. Phase 1 – Cockayne Court – is moving forward and we expect to see a planning application this year. Masterplanning of the whole Estate has started and a decision on the next phases will be made in May 2018.

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. Approximately 140 homes have now been built with many occupied. The focus now is on the design for the District centre, with plans to include a convenience food store, a public house, coffee shop etc. and an assisted living complex close by. Plans should come forward for this important community facility soon.

The new Bohunt secondary school is now into its second academic year and by all accounts things are going well.

The southern part of the site, all of which is in Finchampstead and which up to now has been referred to as the “MFT or Marino Land,” has now been acquired by Legal and General Homes. L and G are currently assessing the site before coming forward with their development plans. We anticipate receiving their first reserved matters application by the summer.

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 February! My thanks also go to Anna the assistant to the clerk, who ensures that we are well prepared for our meetings meet our deadlines and of course do the paperwork.

Cllr Gordon Veitch.
Chair, Planning Committee

Roads and Road Safety Committee Report 2016/17

Traffic monitoring (SDR)

The Parish Council began its Speedwatch operation in 2010 with the purchase of a 24x7 Speed Data Radar logger. This is not an enforcement device and simply collects data about passing vehicles. It records the following vehicle data - speed, length, direction and timestamp. Apart from speed data we also record volumes of traffic at each location.

Interestingly between 2010 and 2014, the volumes of traffic decreased – maybe because of the time of austerity during this period. Levels have just about returned to the 2010 levels.

As you can see with 19 regular monitoring locations, we can only do about 2 checks per annum at each location. The speed data we collect allows us to profile each of the major roads in the parish and provide a historical record of speed improvements (or not) at each location. The profile is only considered to be valid if the traffic flow is “typical”. This means the weeks results are invalidated if there are roadworks, adverse weather conditions or school holidays at any time during the weeks’ check. This profiling is used by the police to deploy additional enforcement at the worst locations we have.

Because of the 7 day runs required by the police and ad hoc roadworks/weather meant we had to purchase a second unit to maximise the weeks available for us to do our checks.

Traffic monitoring (SID)

The next phase of our operation was to purchase a freestanding Speed Indication Device (SID) which displays the speed of approaching vehicles in real time. We do weekly SID sessions for an hour and we record details about every vehicle exceeding police guidelines and this includes speed, make, model and colour of each vehicle.

At this point I would like to express my appreciation for all the volunteers who willingly give up their own time to make our Speedwatch operation second to none within the Wokingham Borough.

Lamp column Replacement

WBC joined forces with Slough and Reading councils on a joint application to the Department for Transport’s Challenge Fund in 2015 to fund a street lighting upgrade scheme. They were successful and secured £18.9 million to share between them.

The three councils are now working together on this scheme, with Slough and Reading doing similar things in their boroughs. The contractor carrying out the work for all three is Volker Highways.

The new LED lanterns will radiate white light, with a neutral colour temperature, compared to older yellow light lanterns. LED’s use considerably less energy (about 60%) to produce the same amount of light. They will also be extending the use of a Central Management System to control and manage the lighting remotely.

Plans for 2018/19

Of course, as a very proactive council, we are always looking to future projects to implement. Here are a few of the things we hope to implement in the forthcoming year.

Avery Corner car park

We have been monitoring the parking habits in this car park and in front of the shops since 2012. We have formulated a plan to provide a drop-off zone which allows for quick drop-off/pick-up at the beginning and

end of the school day. The school will manage the details. We have recently commissioned the implementation of re-lining the car park to facilitate this.

With the WBC implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement in October last year, the police (who don't actually have the resources) will no longer be responsible for enforcing parking infringements. WBC will be employing a third-party organisation to implement this for them.

This means apart from the drop off zone, we intend to turn all 8 bays in front of the shops into 1 hour timed bay (no return within 2 hours) and 7 bays within the car park into 2 hour maximum stay.

Gateway signs

We have been implementing this initiative for several years now. Our objective is to give Finchampstead its own village identity whilst reiterating the speed limits in force. We continue to find possible locations where we can continue the process.

Signs, potholes & footways and reporting problems to WBC

This area is where the Parish Council receives most dialogue with our parishioners.

Whilst WBC do undertake regular checks on our roads, because of the unpredictable nature of problems occurring in this area, they also rely on residents to log problems via their website. In my experience, they are very reactive to problems being reported.

As a Parish Council we do spend a considerable amount of time reporting incidents notified by our residents

We plan to continue working with WBC to try and address the increasing issues of highways, footways and signs being obstructed by vegetation, broken, misleading or dirty, drainage problems, leaf litter and fly-tipping.

Additional Speedwatch equipment

Obviously our Speedwatch operation is not only very important to us but also to our parishioners. We already have the equipment to monitor the roads, and perform additional SID speed checks at the worst locations. This gives us powerful evidence to pass onto the police to achieve extra enforcement measures from them.

Unfortunately, on certain roads this is not enough. Therefore, our next venture is to purchase some post mounted SIDs which we would deploy at problematic locations for a two-week period at a time. We believe these signs provide a better option to the permanent VAS signs currently situated in Finchampstead Road and Nine Mile Ride East. The permanent location of these devices means they lose their effectiveness over a period of time.

Hopefully I can give you an update on this initiative at this time next year.

CLlr Steve Bromley

Chair, Roads & Road Safety Committee.

Appendix E

Committee presentations

Presentations for the Amenities, Planning, Rights of Way, Roads & Road Safety and Finance and General Purposes Committee are included in a separate file.