

## FINCHAMPSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GATHERING OF PARISHIONERS HELD AT 7 PM ON WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH 2020 AT THE FBC CENTRE, GORSE RIDE NORTH, FINCHAMPSTEAD, BERKSHIRE

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**PRESENT:** Councillor R. Cundy, Chairman.  
Councillor S. Bromley, Vice Chairman.

Councillors S. Bowers, D. Cornish, Mrs C. Driver, Mrs B. Eytel, G. Jukes OBE,  
Mrs S. McDonald, Mrs R. Margetts, R. Marshallsay, A. Pearce, G. Veitch, S. Weeks, R. Woof.

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

24 residents.

Representatives from local organisations including:  
Carolyn Fox, Maurice Driver, Finchampstead and California PCC; Gordon Wrigley,  
Finchampstead Society / Allotment Association; Peter Bowsher MBE, MS Therapy Centre;  
Christine Knox, Wokingham Volunteer Centre; Brian Stainton, David Kimber, Friends of  
Finchampstead Ridges; Griff Marshallsay, Pauline Grainger, Allan Gibson, Finchampstead  
Neighbourhood Development Plan; Jacquie Vanstone, Finchampstead CE Primary School;  
Steve Vale, Loddon Valley Ramblers; James Dunn, 1<sup>st</sup> Finchampstead Scouts; Jayne Streak,  
Link Visiting Friendship Alliance; Peter Reilly, Parkrun; Stephen Eddy, Finchampstead  
Neighbourhood Action Group; Amy Fennell, Home Start; T. Alcorn, Social Value Portal;  
WBC Cllr Daniel Sargeant; WBC Officers Joyce Stoner, Simon Bartlam, Peter Baveystock,  
Irum Gulzar, David Hare, Simon Ingle.

#### **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, colleagues from the Borough Council and our Churches.

#### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from  
FPC Cllrs J. May, R. Rampton. WBC Cllr A. Ross. M. Morris, Simon Price, WBC; Inspector A. Lloyd, Thames Valley Police; Dr P. Wilford, CPRE; A. Brown, Nine Mile Ride Primary School; I. McDaniel, Me2 Club;  
D. Eyrie, Wokingham United Charities; N. Doody, Finchampstead Sports Club; R. Hopkins, Legal & General Homes; A. Griffin, Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association; Keep Mobile; R. Clay; R. Dowdle; S. Brown; P. Ward;

#### **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 G, additional reports are included as noted below.

#### **AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT**

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

**PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT**

Cllr G. Veitch. Appendices C and G refer.

**RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix D and G refers.

**ROADS AND ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Cllr S. Bromley. Appendices E and G refer.

**FINANCE & GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT**

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix F and G refer.

**FINCHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP)**

Finchampstead Parish Councillor David Cornish and Griff Marshalsay from the NDP Group provided an update on progress with the Plan.

**OPEN FORUM**

A number of questions and comments were taken from the floor.

**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 2019/20, to view the information on display and to join Parish Councillors for refreshments.

## Chairman's Report 2019/20

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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. I am pleased to say that at the moment we have a full house! Every four years we are obliged to have an election – which falls this year on 7 May and may bring some changes to the Council. Most of the Councillors are here tonight and you will have a chance to meet and speak to them later.

While I will be standing for election and hoping to remain on the Council, I will be standing down as the chair of the council - after 16 years I think it is time to let one of my fellow councillors take on the role.

However, I have this year been elected as the vice chair of the Wokingham Borough / Parish Liaison Forum – partnership working is vital and this is an increasingly important group. I would like to take this opportunity to mention that Katy, our Clerk, is the chair of the Wokingham Clerks Forum, another important and well respected group including the Clerks from all 17 of the Wokingham Town and Parish Councils.

### **Chairmans' summary presented after the Committee reports**

Thank you to the Councillors for their reports and presentations. I hope that this has given all of you an insight into what we do as a Council for the benefit of our Parish and its residents.

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 the regeneration of the Gorse Ride Community which itself is bringing social challenges to the area – something we are trying to address.

We have seen significant changes to the California Country Park this year and progress with the greenway network. We continue to try to build a better working relationship and communications with the Borough Council and look forward to seeing the Localities scheme start to bring positive benefits to our Parish in the coming year. At the same time Community Infrastructure Levy funds provide us with a real opportunity to direct funds to priorities which are important to you, our residents.

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.

**Councillor Roland Cundy**  
**Chair, Finchampstead Parish Council**

## Amenities Committee Report 2019/20

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The Amenities Committee which is made up of 8 Parish Councillors, meets 3 or 4 times a year. Our remit is very wide, ranging from Allotments to Litter Picking via celebrations of National Events.

The Allotments are thriving and a 30 year lease has been obtained from the Borough Council and from Cemex, giving security for many years ahead. There is only 1 plot available, and 6 non-parish residents on the waiting list. We have a total of 98 plots with a maximum of 12 plots for non -parish residents.

Cllr Gordon Veitch, who is a member of the Wokingham Veteran Tree Association is organising a survey of the Wellingtonias on Wellingtonia Avenue, many of which are on privately owned land, and the rest on National Trust land. Almost all landowners have responded positively and the surveys will start next week. The Parish Council is keen to increase the number of trees in Finchampstead and several more have been planted this year. One of these was a Hornbeam, planted in the new churchyard at St James' Church, to commemorate the end of the First World War. A Hornbeam was chosen as it was one of the few trees left standing after the battle of the Somme.

Once again, in November, we remembered those who had died in the two World Wars and in Afghanistan, but for the first time, for reasons of safety, the ceremony was held in the Memorial Park. A small Committee, representing the Church, the Parish Council, the Scouts and the Guides, helped to make this a memorable occasion. We didn't get everything right - a motorised leaf blower was a bit noisy, and maybe facing the bright setting sun was a mistake, but the Church provided tea and cakes in the hall afterwards, which was a bonus, much appreciated, especially by the Scouts.

Our 2 Litter Wardens work hard, but cannot cover every road in the Parish so the Council is grateful to all those individuals who have adopted a street and help to keep it clean and tidy. Should you wish to join "Adopt a Street" there is information at the back of the hall.

The Clerk and Cllr Sylvia Macdonald are organising the Annual Litter Pick, which will take place on 29<sup>th</sup> March This is a popular community event and the Parish Council will be delighted to provide information on how residents can help. We will also be delighted to welcome helpers at the California Crossroads Clean-up which is on Sunday 26 April from around 9.30am.

The Committee has been monitoring progress on the improvements at California Country Park, which are nearing completion.

We have refurbished the noticeboard at Barkham Ride, and the jubilee seat at St James' Church. Two new noticeboards are being installed at the Memorial Hall and St James' Church, but others will not be replaced as it is felt that many residents get information from our web-site.

The red telephone box which is now a Book Swap has proved to be a mixed blessing. Sadly it has been used by some residents to dump unwanted books, many of which were in poor condition and had to be taken to the Tip. We shall continue to monitor the situation, and we are always keen to hear from residents who may have ideas as to the phone box's use.

As the anniversary of VE Day approaches, we have another chance to join in with a National Celebration. St James' Church is to host a Street Party (actually on the grass) 1945 style, on 8<sup>th</sup> May at 4.00pm. There will be a small charge but all are welcome and fancy dress is encouraged. Please watch for posters and information around the Parish, and search out some stunning war-time outfits.

Finally, I have chaired the Amenities Committee for several years so I intend to stand down in May. I would like to thank all members of the Committee for their enthusiasm and hard work, and especially the Clerk for her ongoing advice and support.

**Councillor Mrs Christine Driver**  
**Chair, Amenities Committee**

Appendix C

## Planning Committee Report 2019/20

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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 adjoining parishes. The parish council are “consultees” and as such do not make the final decision, this is the responsibility of WBC. We also review tree works required to trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO’s).

The Committee meets every four weeks and in the past 12 month period we have reviewed 173 planning applications, on average 14 per month. Most of these applications are routine and non-controversial, often for minor changes or extensions; others are more complex and controversial. There is a wide range of complexity, from tree houses to new estates, 183 homes in an adjoining parish for example. In January the committee was pleased to support the application for new public toilets and a “Changing Places” facility for the disabled at California Country Park. Occasionally members of the public attend our meeting in order to support or more commonly object to applications being considered.

In June we received the first Rural Exception site application for 4 affordable homes in the Village. Although the Parish Council supported this application it was subsequently turned down by WBC.

When considering applications the committee tries to represent the views of the immediate neighbours and the majority view of parishioners.

Unsuccessful applicants may appeal the decision and when such appeals result in a public enquiry, a planning committee member will normally attend and may speak at the hearing. The inquiry is chaired by a government inspector from the Planning Inspectorate. Such an inquiry was held in March last year to consider an application to build 216 homes on land adjacent to Sandmartins Golf Club, Finchampstead road. There was a lot of public interest in this application and a very active residents group opposed it, as did the Parish Council. The appeal was subsequently dismissed.

A more recent inquiry related to Land North of Nine Mile Ride was held in February this year and we await the inspector’s decision.

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 has been the continued receipt of unwelcome planning applications from developers for large scale and unplanned housing developments in the parish. I have already mentioned a couple of these. WBC now has a much more robust approach to such applications but we remain vigilant and 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 space.

**The Local Plan Update**

WBC continues with the development of its new local plan for the period to 2036 and you may recall me mentioning last year the phase known as “Call for Sites”. This is when land owners put forward sites for possible development. 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 and again as part of the latest phase of the local plan. We are pleased to see that in the Local Plan Consultation which is due to close on March 20<sup>th</sup>, the major development planned will be in a proposed new Garden Village at Grazeley. Only a few small scale sites are proposed for our Parish. I hope you have all taken the opportunity to submit your views!

### **Gorse Ride Regeneration**

The regeneration of the Gorse Ride estate is now under way. The first phase of the development involves the construction of 46 new flats and houses where Cockayne Court once stood. This is due to be completed later this year.

We understand that plans for the remaining part of the Estate are now being finalised and we expect to see a planning application come forward soon. This second phase will include a further 248 flats, houses and bungalows.

### **The Arborfield Strategic Development Location (SDL)**

Over the past year the new development at Arborfield Garrison has continued to move forward. The northern part of the development is now known as Arborfield Green, and although most of this lies in Barkham Parish there are about 150 new homes now occupied in Finchampstead Parish.

The southern part of the site, all of which is in Finchampstead, is being developed by Legal and General Homes and is now known as Finchwood Park. The first properties here were occupied in December last year and eventually there will be 1500 homes on this development.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their continued enthusiasm and regular attendance at our monthly meetings! My thanks also go to Anna the assistant to the clerk, who ensures that we are well prepared for our meetings and achieve our deadlines and of course do the paperwork.

**Councillor Gordon Veitch**  
**Chair, Planning Committee**

Appendix D

## **Rights of Way Committee Report 2019/20**

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After the wettest February on record keeping rights of way open is a challenge - weather events /climate change have made some areas close to the Blackwater almost impossible - FP33 (from Longwater Lane towards the river) and FP 3 from the Reading Road are examples and even elsewhere the ground is sometimes saturated.

However there are some positive results from previous work. Footpath 15 (Wick Hill) has remained fairly dry throughout and BP 4 has only minor puddles after work by WBC and drainage improvements by BBOWT – the Wildlife Trust.

We intend to get quotations for drainage improvements on BP 26 (Heath Ride to Goose Green) but a blockage of the gully under the bridleway has caused even worse flooding and awaits clearance by WBC.

And in recent weeks we have funded the improvements to the surface of Byway 24 (leading to Wellingtonia Avenue) carried out by WBC and have re-surfaced the path from Briarwood to the FBC playing fields – which is well used as a route to school and the multi use games area

It is hugely disappointing that Cemex have now applied for a further extension to their extraction activities on Manor Farm site and the restoration on Fleet Hill. We have made a number of proposals to WBC which we hope will be made conditions of any such extension. These include the completion and opening to the public as soon as possible of all rights of way on Fleet Hill and those on Manor Farm which are not affected by the ongoing extraction.

We are pleased to report that the new bridge for horse-riders and cyclists is now installed in California Country Park and our longstanding ambitions for a link between the existing bridleway and Nine Mile Ride have been fulfilled.

We have also helped to fund a walkway around Spout Pond which is part of the new Ridges Ramble which was officially opened by the National Trust earlier today.

WBC is working on a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan and we have contributed ideas for new routes and have started work with them on developing a safe cycle route from Finchampstead to the centre of Wokingham.

We are also working with the Ramblers to identify suitable locations to improve access to Rights of Way by replacing stiles with new kissing gates.

Finally in order to encourage greater use of the existing network we have been working on a new Parish Rights of Way map and once WBC complete their work on revision of the Definitive Map for the whole Borough we should be able to complete this.

**Councillor Roger Woof**  
**Chair, Rights of Way Committee**

Appendix E

## Roads and Road Safety Committee Report 2019/20

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### **Traffic monitoring**

The majority of the effort in the Roads and Road Safety committee is on traffic monitoring. You are familiar with the equipment that we use to monitor speed across the parish and to educate drivers on the routes with the worst records. We are still conducting a weekly Speedwatch in targeted one hour SID sessions at the worst locations to identify and report to the police any vehicles which are breaching speed guidelines.

I'd like to spend some time talking about how we are extending this operation to other neighbouring parishes.

In the last 12 months Thames Valley Police have started their own speedwatch initiative for towns and parishes that don't have their own operation. Because of its breadth of coverage, this is much more intermittent and less locally focussed than our own operation which runs independent of the TVP scheme, having been established for many years. However, as a result of the TVP scheme, neighbouring parishes have expressed an interest in learning more about what we do.

Towards the end of last year, I was approached by Barkham Parish council and I have spent considerable time mentoring them and advising on how to establish their own operation. They have

now purchased their own equipment and are following a similar regimen to our own. I have recently been approached by Swallowfield parish council to assist them in the same way. I believe that this is important for our parish as it extends the area covered by speedwatch operations to roads that link with our own. This helps in the overall education of local road users.

### **Sharing ideas**

It is also a good opportunity to share ideas and we are considering adopting an idea from Barkham to put up signs that indicate that drivers are entering a speed watch area as they enter Finchampstead parish. We believe this will also go some way to protect our dedicated volunteers from intimidation. I would like to especially thank those volunteers, without whom we could not operate our speedwatches to the level that we do.

I will be attending the Wokingham Clerk's forum on 1<sup>st</sup> April to present on our speedwatch operation and continue to spread the word to other parish councils!

### **Signs, potholes & footways**

Signs, potholes, fly-tipping and footways are the topics where the Parish Council receives most dialogue from our parishioners. Indeed, we are very aware of particular problems due to recent heavier than normal rainfall – I can see the frustration every day from social media posts as well as my own experiences. But, as you may be aware, Finchampstead Parish council has no direct control of the highway maintenance of local roads. Over the last couple of years, however, we have been very proactive in trying to improve the quality of the roadside verges and the visibility and accuracy of road signs. You can see from the examples that many signs get rendered invisible by overgrown vegetation, unreadable through traffic grime or algae and occasionally even turned around by wind or mischief makers.

Having provided a detailed report with examples to the Wokingham Scrutiny Panel, they initially took this seriously and started to take action. Sadly, this activity was not sustained. More recently, Wokingham BC have introduced a Localities Officer and, following meetings with them, they have been more proactive, and action is being taken.

### **Reporting**

Diligent reporting of problems really does make a difference, and we don't want to lose this momentum. So we appeal to all of our parishioners to photograph and take note of the location of any examples of poor signage, verges, or potholes either close to your home or whilst you are walking round the parish and report them direct to Wokingham Borough Council through their website.

### **Close**

None of this progress would be possible without the active participation of our Clerk and other members of our Roads and Roads Safety Committee as well as our dedicated volunteers. I would like to give my thanks to you all.

**Councillor Steve Bromley**  
**Chair, Roads & Road Safety Committee**



## Finance & General Management Committee Report 2019/20

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This committee is responsible for the General Management of the Parish Council and is the engine room which drives everything we do. Whilst Finance is of course a major part of this I would like first to report on some of the other diverse activities which have taken place in the past year.

### **Communications and Consultation**

- E newsletters, Annual Report, events, Facebook
- New web site launched September 2019. Modern and accessible

### **Structure and support**

- Appraisals
- LGRC review of future needs - recommendation that we should engage a deputy clerk to enable us to progress a number of important activities which will require additional support
- IT support
- Policies and procedures
- Organisation changes

### **Finance**

#### **Grants and donations**

- FBC youth work – support for local schools to include everyone in extra-curricular activities, BVCP, local guides, citizens advice, keep mobile, local community halls

#### **Community Infrastructure Levy**

- Receipts of serious money – £575,245 already enabled us to complete some important quick hits which bring direct benefit to local people
- In future we expect significant amounts will be requested by WBC to support major infrastructure projects
- Starting to evaluate and progress our own list of projects which have grown out of the consultation in 2018.

#### **Budget and precept**

- 2019/20 expected results – minor overspend – reserves adequate (they should not be much more than that)
- In 2020/21 plan to continue making use of CIL money to carry out worthwhile projects without unduly increasing the burden on the Parish precept.
- However some important ongoing activities cannot be funded by CIL money and there has therefore been necessary to make a small increase this year of about £1 on a typical band D property – bringing this to £26.96.

So what else could you get for your £1?

**Councillor Roger Woof**

**Chair, Finance & General Management Committee**

## Committee presentations 2019/20

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