

FINCHAMPSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GATHERING OF PARISHIONERS HELD AT 7 PM ON WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2023 AT THE FBC CENTRE, GORSE RIDE NORTH, FINCHAMPSTEAD, BERKSHIRE

PRESENT: Councillor S. Weeks, Chair.
Councillors E. Allen; D. Cornish; R. Cundy; G. Evans; B. Eytle; P. Grainger;
G. Jukes OBE; S. McDonald; R. Marshallsay, A. Pearce; G. Veitch & R. Woof.

Clerk – K. Dagnall; Deputy Clerk – K. Lang;
Planning Committee Clerk – C. Cordell.

Approximately 20 guests including residents; representatives from the
Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan Group; Sue Ryder Duchess of
Kent; Citizens Advice Wokingham. Wokingham Borough Officers.

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

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

Cllr Weeks 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.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from
Finchampstead Parish Councillors S. Bromley; S. Bowers; C. Mortimer & S. Gurney.

Sargeant P. Bentley, Thames Valley Police; A. Brown, Nine Mile Ride Primary School; N. Fellows,
Wokingham Volunteer Centre.

THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Cllr S. Weeks. 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 S. McDonald. Appendix G refers.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr R. Cundy. Appendices C and G refer.

RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr D. Cornish. Appendix G refers.

ROADS & ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr R. Cundy. Appendices E and G refer.

FINANCE & GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix G refers.

FINCHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP)

David Cornish, Parish Councillor and Chair of the NDP Steering Group provided an update on the current position with the Plan.

CITIZENS ADVICE WOKINGHAM

Jake Morrison, Chief Executive, gave a presentation on the work of the organisation.

OPEN FORUM

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

CONCLUSION

Cllr Weeks thanked the Parish Councillors for their hard work, all undertaken voluntarily, over the past year. The Parish Council staff were also thanked for their support and work over the year.

Those present were invited to join Parish Councillors for refreshments.

Appendix A

Chairman's Report 2022/23

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. However, we have had some changes over the last year. At our last Annual Gathering in May 2022 we announced the resignation of our longest standing Councillor, Chris Driver. In September we welcomed Chris Mortimer to the team.

More recently, Emily Biskup and Rebecca Margetts stood down, and just two weeks ago we welcomed Eric Allen and Pauline Grainger as our newest recruits to the Councillor team.

Most of the Councillors are here tonight and you will have a chance to meet and speak to them later.

We have also seen staff changes, with Kate Lang joining us as Deputy Clerk just last week.

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. The pandemic has brought its own challenges, but despite this we have been able to make significant progress with some projects and areas of work.

Community Infrastructure Levy funds provide us with a real opportunity to direct funds to priorities which are important to you, our residents. These funds, and the emerging Neighbourhood Development Plan which you will hear more about in a moment, are central to our work, and to the development of our forward plans.

We continue to try to build a better working relationship and communications with the Borough Council as by working together we can make best use of resources to help maintain and improve services and facilities for our residents. For the same reason we also look for opportunities to work with our neighbouring Town and Parish Councils.

We are helped in this by Councillor Roland Cundy's role as Vice Chair of the Borough Parish Liaison Forum. In addition, Katy Dagnall, our Clerk, chairs the Wokingham Clerks Forum, an important and well respected group including the Clerks from all of the 17 Wokingham Town and Parish Councils.

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 Simon Weeks
Chair, Finchampstead Parish Council

Appendix B

Amenities Committee Report 2022/23

Refer to Appendix G.

Councillor Sylvia McDonald
Chair, Amenities Committee

Appendix C

Planning Committee Report 2022/23

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 Wokingham Borough Council, the Planning Authority. We also review tree works required to protected trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO’s).

The Committee meets every four weeks and in the past 12-month period we have reviewed 204 planning applications, on average 17 per month. Most of these applications are routine and non-controversial, often for minor changes or extensions; others are more complex and controversial. We have objected to 39 of these applications, however WBC only objected to 18, and 9 others were withdrawn.

There is a wide range of complexity, from tree houses to new estates, 150 homes in an adjoining parish for example. Occasionally members of the public and developers attend our meeting to support, propose or more commonly object to applications being considered.

When considering applications, the committee tries to represent the views of the immediate neighbours and the majority view of parishioners but of course taking into consideration of WBC planning policy and guidelines and now the policies in our emerging neighbourhood development plan. This already carries some weight and when adopted will be an even more important reference point for the Planning Committee. Unsuccessful applicants may appeal the decision made by WBC, 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 recently concerning land at the rear of Johnson Drive. A member of the planning committee attended that appeal however the inspector allowed the development to proceed. Since then, an application for 5 houses has been given permission from WBC.

An inquiry relating to 32 houses on Land south of Nine Mile Ride to which we objected last year was recently heard. Again, a member of the planning committee attended this inquiry and again the Inspector allowed this application to proceed.

From time to time there are planning related matters that contravene planning policy and guidelines. Such matters are referred to the Wokingham Borough Planning Enforcement team for attention. The parish council maintains a list of parish issues and reviews these monthly through to resolution to ensure nothing is overlooked and to try and ensure that issues are dealt with in a timely and effective manner by WBC. Sometimes major issues are taken to court for resolution. We monitor the progress of the Borough's progress with the Local Plan Update and liaise with WBC over this. We also respond to consultations, including the recent Government consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly with regard to the numbers of houses expected to be built.

On to two of the major developments in the Parish.

The regeneration of Gorse Ride is underway, with phase 1 complete, and work underway on phase 2A. It will be several years before the development is complete, but the success of phase 1 shows that it will be well worth waiting for.

The Arborfield Strategic Development Location continues to progress, although rather slowly. The development – including Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park, has already brought some 450 new homes to Finchampstead, with many more to come at Finchwood Park in the years ahead, along with a primary school, allotments and other community facilities – all within Finchampstead Parish. As mentioned earlier, we are not the decision maker on planning applications. However, we will continue our efforts to safeguard the local environment by considering all applications, and putting forward our comments to the Borough Council.

Finally, thank you to the Committee members and Caroline for their hard work over the past year.

Councillor Roland Cundy
Chair, Planning Committee

Appendix D

Rights of Way Committee Report 2022/23

Refer to Appendix G.

Councillor David Cornish
Chair, Rights of Way Committee

Appendix E

Roads and Road Safety Committee Report 2022/23

Traffic monitoring

The majority of the effort in the Roads and Road Safety committee is on traffic monitoring. You may be familiar with the equipment that we have been using across the parish to monitor speed and to educate drivers on the routes with the worst speeding records. However, this has changed this year on two counts: -

1. We now use TagMaster Black Cat Radar units to monitor traffic movements and speed.
2. We continue to run sessions from the Thames Valley Police Community Speedwatch operation very much based around their Community Speedwatch website.

If you would like to volunteer, you must join and register on their website and then join the FINCHAMPSTEAD group. Part of the training is to view some videos and answer a series of tests. If you achieve a 90% score or better in the tests you become an operator.

We continue to utilize the Unipar Sentinel camera which records 10 second videos of vehicles exceeding the police guidelines that records speed and time. This makes processing the results much easier.

We enter these results on the CSW website and the vehicle owners receive a letter from the police regarding the speeding.

We resumed weekly sessions on February 3rd after our Christmas break and are at present looking for extra operators if you are interested.

Speedwatch signs and gateways

Working closely with Barkham Parish Council we have designed some Community Speedwatch signs which have been approved by TVP and WBC. We have now had these signs installed on the major entrances into our parish.

We have also worked with WBC to produce new gateway signs installed at the major entrances into the parish. We are currently trying to get one more installed on the new Nine Mile Ride Extension Road.

Signs, potholes & footways

Signs, potholes, fly-tipping, and footways are the topics where the Parish Council receives most dialogue from our parishioners.

Finchampstead Parish council has no direct control of the highway maintenance of local roads. It is WBC who are the Highway Authority and are responsible for all roads issues. Over the last few 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.

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. These should be reported directly to Wokingham Borough Council through their website. A record of this is made and you will be advised of the outcome. Sometimes the process is slow but it does work. Don't assume someone else will report the issue

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 (which currently includes 4 other Parish Councilors). I would like to give my thanks once again to you all.

Councillor Roland Cundy
Vice Chair, Roads & Road Safety Committee

Appendix F

Finance & General Management Committee Report 2022/23

Refer to Appendix G.

Councillor Roger Woof
Vice Chair, Finance & General Management Committee

Appendix G

Committee presentations 2022/23

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