

## **FINCHAMPSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GATHERING OF PARISHIONERS HELD AT 7 PM ON WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH 2024 AT THE FBC CENTRE, GORSE RIDE NORTH, FINCHAMPSTEAD, BERKSHIRE**

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**PRESENT:** Councillor S. Weeks, Chair.  
Councillors E. Allen, S. Bowers, S. Bromley, R. Cundy, B. Eytle, S. Gurney, G. Jukes  
OBE, R. Marshallsay, S. McDonald, G. Veitch & R. Woof.

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

Approximately 25 residents.

#### **CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

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

#### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Finchampstead Parish Councillors; D. Cornish, G. Evans, P. Grainger, A. Grimshaw & C. Mortimer.

#### **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 G. Jukes OBE. Appendix G refers.

#### **ROADS & ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Cllr S. Bromley. Appendices E and G refer.

#### **FINANCE & GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT**

Cllr R. Woof. Appendix G refers.

#### **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 2023/24

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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.

There are quite a few of us on the Council – in fact we have 17 Councillor places, and I am pleased to say that we currently have a full house. Most of the Councillors are here tonight and you will have a chance to meet and speak to them later.

We have had a difficult and challenging year. In July our experienced and full-time Parish Clerk, Katy Dagnall, fell ill and sadly died in October. This was a huge loss to us all and Katy will be very sadly missed.

However, losing our only full-time member of staff for 9 months was very disruptive particularly to planned work. Fortunately, we have been able to recruit a new clerk and are pleased to say that Amanda Everett starts in April.

I must thank Kate Lang and Caroline Cordell, our part-time Deputy and Planning Clerks, for their additional work during this difficult period. Also, my thanks to all the Parish Councillors, especially Committee Chairs, who have had an increased workload. Without the additional time commitment of part time Clerks and Councillors, who are all volunteers, we could not have functioned.

Moving forward, the highlight of the last year was the successful conclusion of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan (FNDP). This was largely due to over 4 years of hard work by a group of committed residents and Parish Councillors. The Referendum in September was successful with 89% of residents voting in support, which means that Finchampstead now has additional protection against inappropriate development.

Despite three years of delays, The California Crossroads redevelopment is now, as we all know, underway. This Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) project, funded by developers, was planned over five years ago. Throughout this period the Parish Council has liaised with WBC Highways and local businesses to try and minimise the inevitable disruption caused by such a major project. We continue to meet with them on a weekly basis to discuss progress and issues.

I'm delighted to say the Parish Council has continued to award funding to many local groups. The largest beneficiaries were all three primary schools, where we have funded significant and costly outdoor play equipment which is now installed. We also provided funding for further improvement works at California Country Park, which have unfortunately been delayed by WBC. Additionally, we contributed towards pv solar panels on the roof of the Ratepayer's Hall.

This year we hope to fund improvements to our well used public footpaths, which have seen a pounding due to all the rain! We are continuing to lobby WBC Highways to improve many deteriorating local road surfaces and also to use their limited powers to discourage utility companies from regularly disrupting travel around Finchampstead.

I'm also pleased that, despite resource constraints, we have managed to continue to produce a regular e-newsletter which goes to more than a thousand households across the Parish.

## **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 difficult year of challenges, and we have been unable to make the progress we would have hoped for on some projects and other areas of work. With the appointment of Amanda in April, we hope to move forward with this once again.

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 2023/24**

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Refer to Appendix G.

**Councillor Sylvia McDonald**  
**Chair, Amenities Committee**

## **Appendix C**

### **Planning Committee Report 2023/24**

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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 protected trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's).

The Committee meets every four weeks and in the past 12-month period we have reviewed 139 planning applications, on average 12 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 23 of these applications, however WBC only objected to 12, and 2 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 our neighbourhood development plan. 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 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.

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 that issues are dealt with in a timely and effective manner. Sometimes 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. We have had several enforcements appealed against and will involve a public inquiry. We will ensure that our views are held at the inquiry.

WBC and the parish council now has a much more robust approach to such applications, but we remain vigilant, and you can be assured that we will continue to treat these issues 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.

**Councillor Roland Cundy**  
**Chair, Planning Committee**

## **Appendix D**

### **Rights of Way Committee Report 2023/24**

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Refer to Appendix G.

**Councillor Graham Jukes OBE**  
**Vice Chair, Rights of Way Committee**

## **Appendix E**

### **Roads and Road Safety Committee Report 2023/24**

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#### **Traffic monitoring**

Most 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 to monitor speed across the parish and to educate drivers on the routes with the worst records.

1. We now use TagMaster Black Cat Radar units to monitor traffic movements.
2. We continue to run sessions from the Thames Valley Police Community Speedwatch operation very much based around their Community Speedwatch website.
3. We continue to utilize the Unipar Sentinel camera which records 10 second videos of vehicles exceeding the police guidelines which show speed and time. This makes processing the results much easier.
4. We also use the Simple SID which gives an indication of speed to approaching vehicles.
5. We enter these results on the CSW website, and the vehicle keepers receive a letter from the police regarding speeding.

We resumed weekly sessions on February 5th after our Christmas break and are desperately 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 get new gateway signs installed at the major entrances into the parish which didn't already have them installed. We are currently trying to get one installed at the Nine Mile Ride Extension junction with A327.

### **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 and report them direct to Wokingham Borough Council through their website. When you do this a record 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 CSW volunteers (which currently includes 4 other Parish Councilors). I would like to give my thanks once again to you all.

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

## **Appendix F**

### **Finance & General Management Committee Report 2023/24**

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Refer to Appendix G.

**Councillor Roger Woof**  
**Chair, Finance & General Management Committee**

## **Appendix G**

### **Committee presentations 2023/24**

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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.**