

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2022 - REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, FAWKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Introduction

Fawkham Parish Council (FPC) consists of five voluntary Councillors, two of whom were elected or re-elected for a four year term in May 2019, and three of whom were co-opted this year. We are one of the smallest Parish Councils in Kent.

The five Members are: Laura Evans (Chair), Maxine Fothergill, Lucie Sleeman, Will Johnstone and James Cherry. We express thanks to Duncan Harker, Alun Evans and Jolene Truder who previously served as Councillors. And we are pleased to welcome Lucie and Will, both of whom grew up in Fawkham, and James who has recently moved here.

We employ a Clerk, who is paid for eight hours a week. Our clerk is Grace Champion who joined us in September 2021 and who has seamlessly taken on the role from our previous Clerk.

Face-to-face monthly Parish Council meetings resumed from May 2021, held at the village hall, and, as always, members of the public are welcome to attend. Meeting dates are given on the PC's website, along with the agenda and minutes of each meeting.

An overview of your Parish Council's activity over the past year is given below:

- **Extension of the 30mph speed limit:** We are very pleased that, following a request by FPC for the speed limits along the entire length of Valley Road to be reviewed against the latest Department for Transport guidelines, it was agreed that the current 30mph limit can be extended.
 - It will continue northwards from the junction with Speedgate Hill, past the school and village hall and end close to the property called Crispens.
 - The road markings at the start of the 30mph zone/end of the national speed limit zone close to the village green will also be upgraded.
 - The cost of this, estimated at just below £9,000, will be met from FPC's Community Infrastructure Levy funds, rather than from the precept.
 - We are waiting to hear from Kent County Council when the work will go ahead.
- **Neighbourhood Plan:** FPC resolved in December 2020 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Fawkham Parish. This is a legal document that can give a community a legal say in local planning matters, including what new development looks like and what green spaces it would like to protect. It can be a powerful tool to guide future development.

So far:

- The area to be covered by the plan (the whole of the Parish) was registered with SDC.
- A Steering Group has been set up to work on the plan, with working groups formed to develop an evidence base covering housing and the built environment, community facilities, and biodiversity and the natural environment. These topics reflect the issues you said were important to you in the 2019 village survey.
- We successfully applied for the maximum grant available to help with the cost of preparing the plan; the remaining funds have been raised by increasing the precept for both 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- The Steering Groups and working groups are supported by an independent consultant, who is a Chartered Town Planner, to ensure we meet statutory Neighbourhood Plan regulations and use best practice.

- We have conducted surveys seeking the community's thoughts on the Countryside and with businesses within the Parish. All the children at Fawkham Primary School filled in a questionnaire for us, and a workshop seeking the community's view on the local landscape character was held in February.
 - We held a picnic on the grass at Small Grains and had a stall at the church fete in September, providing an overview of our progress and to gather people's thoughts and opinions.
 - Hartley Parish Council are also preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and we are liaising with them, especially regarding our common boundary.
 - If you would like to get more involved in the Neighbourhood Plan, please let us know.
 - Please visit: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/neighbourhood-plan/> for more information and to keep up to date with progress.
- **Local Housing Needs Survey:** Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) conduct these surveys every five years and one took place in November 2021 for Fawkham.
 - A survey was posted to every household in the Parish which resulted in a 20% response rate.
 - The survey identified a low level of need for three affordable homes.
 - In addition a need for seven open market properties was identified, including one for an older household wanting to downsize (with no need for level access) and four who were interested in self-build open market houses only.
 - FPC considered the results of the survey and are supportive of a local lettings plan being pursued for some of the ten affordable homes at Salts Farm depot to meet this needs.
 - FPC considers the need for four self-build open market houses may be possible through redevelopment of existing sites, and that the other three open market needs can be met through market churn.
 - The survey report can be found here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Fawkham-HNS-FEBRUARY-2022-FINAL.pdf>
- **Planning:** the PC is consulted by SDC and comments on every planning application in the parish, although our view is only advisory. Like all rural communities in the Green Belt, the challenge is to get the balance right between supporting owners to make reasonable adaptations, extensions and improvements, but standing firm against inappropriate development that causes harm to the Green Belt or threatens the character of the parish.
 - Around 20 applications were considered and commented on by the Parish Council, plus a number of planning conditions were also commented upon.
 - The largest application considered was the redevelopment of Fawkham Manor, with a revised submission being granted permission by SDC. The manor house itself is being converted into eight apartments, and the hospital wings demolished and replaced with three blocks of three-storey townhouses, giving a total of 26 dwellings. FPC expressed concerns over the traffic management plan for the demolition and construction work, which, working together with our District Councillors, resulted in changes being made.
 - Submission of a detailed planning application for Salts Farm depot is awaited, following the granting of outline permission on appeal for 26 dwellings there.
 - The PC has raised various concerns with Planning Enforcement during the year which SDC are/have investigated, with taken further action where required.
- **MP visit:** Laura Trott, our local MP, made two visits to the Parish in August and October following us contacting her to express our concerns over proposed changes to the planning system and the implications for the protection of Fawkham's Green Belt, and to discuss issues with the roads in terms of traffic and speed.
- **Other highways issues:** concerns over Fawkham's roads and lanes featured prominently in the village survey as things residents don't like about living here. As a result, we devote a lot of our time to helping address these issues.

- We updated our Highways Improvement Plan submitted to KCC, which was focused on the speed limit review. We will prepare a new plan for 2022/23 shortly. Please let us know if you have any improvements you would like to see.
 - Residents are reminded of the importance of reporting all accidents to the Police, especially if they involve any personal injury. It is these crash data statistics that are used to direct KCC's available funds to the areas that need it the most.
 - We supported a resident in a complaint to Thames Water regarding the lack of planned maintenance of the sewer system in the parish, and the resulting all-too-frequent flooding of Valley Road with foul water, and were pleased to see that Thames Water agreed to a planned maintenance programme for the area in question.
 - Over the last couple of years, we have raised a number of issues with KCC about the drainage system in the Parish, pushing them to inspect it. This identified a number of faults which were then repaired, for example, south of the school and around the village green. Feedback from residents is that improvements have been seen.
 - We continue to make good use of KCC's online reporting tool to get repairs done, including lots of pothole repairs. Details of how to use this reporting tool can be found on our website: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/directory/name/road-issues-how-to-report-a-problem/>
 - We continue to request litter picks of the road from Sevenoaks District Council every 6-7 months.
- **Public Rights of Way:** a group of volunteers, both Parish Councillors and residents, have agreed to walk all the public footpaths in the parish at least once a year to check for any problems such as missing signs, broken stiles or blockages.
 - FPC was consulted on a proposed diversion to SD163 at Cross House, the outcome of which is awaited, and on an obstruction to SD224 close to Fawkham Manor.
 - The public footpaths can be seen here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Fawkham-footpaths-with-numbers-pdf.pdf>
 - **Smart Bin:** FPC worked with SDC and St. Mary's Church over the location of a new smart litter bin in the church car park, which advises SDC when it needs to be emptied.
 - **Wildflower planting:** wildflower seeds were sown onto the triangle of land at the junction of Rogers Wood Lane and Gallows Wood, and we liaised with KCC over the installation of bollards to prevent it being driven over. We asked residents if they would also like to see wildflower seeds sown on Baldwins Green at the bottom of Castle Hill and, following a resounding 'yes', a group of volunteers sowed seeds in the autumn which should begin to flower in 2022. We also asked KCC to review the frequency of grass cuts to the verges along Valley Road. Many need to be cut to maintain sight lines for road safety, but some areas will now be cut less frequently to enable wildflowers to grow: bee orchids and pyramidal orchids flowered on these in the summer.
 - **Fawkham's Remembrance Service:** this was able to take place this year; a wreath was laid and a donation made to the British Legion on behalf of the village. The war memorial and Parish signs were again decorated with poppies knitted by friends of the village. We would like to thank Peter Cronk who has taken responsibility for looking after the planting around the war memorial, which is looking much improved.
 - **The Christmas tree lights switch on:** this took place in late November, with chocolate packs handed out to children (and a similar number donated to the Community Cupboard food bank). The Rising Sun Inn kindly provided mulled wines and mince pies in the pub afterwards. Easter chocolates for children were left by the Easter bunny on both village greens.
 - **Lorry Watch:** replacement signs were obtained and put up following damage to, and the disappearance of, some of the previous signs. More residents are needed to help to enable Lorry

Watch sessions to be restarted, though please continue to report to us any inappropriate use of Valley Road, which has a 7.5T except for access restriction. If you are interested in helping with Lorry Watch, please contact us. <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/lorry-watch/>

• **Fawkham Village Hall:** FPC is the sole trustee for the village hall. For some of the year, the hall had to be closed due to the pandemic but it was available to hirers when possible. The hall has a good level of regular hirers and its income is forecast to more than cover the annual running costs. A number of Covid-related grants were successfully applied for. A full report on the village hall is prepared for its AGM each May, and posted here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/village-hall/>.

What are we most looking forward to in the next 12 months?

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, our key priority is to continue to make progress with the **Neighbourhood Plan**, which will include various ways of consulting and engaging with the community in its preparation. Evidence gathering is nearing completion, following which we plan to hold workshops with residents to prepare a vision for the future of the Parish, with supporting objectives, and then policies which help deliver that vision.

We are also looking forward to celebrating the **Queen's Platinum Jubilee**, with a family event planned for Sunday 5th June. Please watch the website for more details of this.

What issues and concerns should villagers be aware of in the next 12 months?

The Local Plan: we await information on SDC's revised Local Plan, the development of which we are closely monitoring, and we will keep residents informed about this. A "Call for Sites" closed in January and details of the sites put forward are awaited, along with the outcome of SDC's assessment of their suitability for development. SDC are updating a number of the documents within their evidence base, including a stage 2 Green Belt Review (including the Green Belt edge around Hartley), updated Settlement Hierarchy and a new Characterisation Study, all of which we will review and comment upon once available. We are currently advised by SDC that the PC and the public will be consulted on the draft Local Plan in late summer/early autumn in what is called the Regulation 18 consultation process. If sites within Fawkham Parish are included for proposed development, we will hold public meetings to discuss them.

Laura Evans
Chair, Fawkham Parish Council
April 2022