

# ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2021- REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, FAWKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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## Introduction

Fawkham Parish Council consists of five voluntary Councillors, four of whom were elected or re-elected for a four year term in May 2019, and one of whom was co-opted in 2020. The five Members are: Laura Evans (Chair), Alun Evans (Vice Chair), Duncan Harker Maxine Fothergill and Jolene Truder. We are one of the smallest Parish Councils in Kent.

We employ a Clerk, who is paid for eight hours a week. Our clerk is Laura Marchant who joined us in January 2020, and who has made a great contribution to the Parish Council in her first year.

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## Coronavirus Pandemic

Ahead of the first period of lockdown, the Parish Council distributed a leaflet to every house in the village, offering help to those unable to leave their homes, and seeking volunteers able to offer help. Around 15 villagers joined the volunteer group and were able to quickly assist with the small number of requests for help that were received.

We were unable to hold a Parish Meeting last year and instead, reports were published to the website. The Parish Council held monthly meetings via Zoom throughout the pandemic and we found more residents tended to join those, compared to the numbers attending in person at the hall. However, virtual meetings are no longer legal, and face-to-face Parish Council meetings resumed from May 2021, held at the village hall, and, as always, members of the public are welcome to attend.

Various steps were taken to ensure the Council could continue to operate during the pandemic, while complying with Government restrictions.

An idea that took off during the first lockdown was “Fawkham Rocks”. Many villagers, young and old, enjoyed painting rocks and hiding them around the village and its footpaths for others to find and rehide. Many posted photos of their finds on the Fawkham Facebook Group, and this simple activity brought some joy during what was a difficult time: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/galleries/fawkham-rocks/>.

The restrictions meant that planned events, such as further village walks and a Victory Picnic to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day, could not be held. A cobnut tree was planted in the churchyard to commemorate the anniversary, and a plaque was also installed for the tree planted to commemorate the 50th anniversary, which is now a tall horse chestnut tree by the entrance to the church meadow from Steephill. Many villagers celebrated with picnics in their driveways, and posts were made throughout the day to the Facebook Group about what happened in Fawkham during World War II. A VE Day-themed rock competition was held, judged by the Priest-in-Charge, with lots of great entries: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/galleries/ve-day-75-in-2020/>

A “grow a sunflower” competition was held, with (mostly!) children collecting a seed and pot and seeing how tall they grew.

Many villagers joined in the clap for the NHS on a Thursday evening, with the final clap attended by many on the green (socially distanced, of course): <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/galleries/coronavirus-lockdown-2020/>.

Although the lockdown period was almost unimaginable before it happened, there was a definite increase in community spirit in Fawkham, with people talking to and helping their neighbours, and exploring the footpaths around the village for the allowed “daily exercise.”

The Parish Council has plans to bury a time capsule to mark the pandemic, which featured in Sevenoaks District Council’s In Shape magazine: [https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/2962/in\\_shape\\_-\\_june\\_2020\\_-\\_colour\\_version](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/2962/in_shape_-_june_2020_-_colour_version)

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## Other Parish Council Activities:

An overview of other Parish Council activity over the past year is given below:

- **Planning:** the PC is consulted 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 village.
  - Twenty applications were considered and commented on by the Parish Council.
  - Two major developments were applied for during the year: the redevelopment of Salts Farm depot with 26 housing units and the redevelopment of Fawkham Manor hospital.
  - The PC objected to Salts Farm depot on a number of grounds and it was refused by SDC. However, on appeal the Planning Inspector decided that it should be allowed after weighing up a number of factors including the substantial harm caused to the Green Belt on the one side and SDC’s grave position regarding providing sufficient housing on the other. Two members of the PC attended the virtual appeal which was held over four days, and spoke at the hearing. Submission of a full planning application is now awaited.
  - The Chair of the PC applied for Fawkham Manor to be listed on the basis of its association with the Victorian architect EB Lamb. The application was successful and the manor house was listed in November. The planning application is to convert the manor house into eight apartments and to demolish the hospital wings and replace them with three blocks of three-story townhouses, giving a total of 26 dwellings. The first application was refused on the basis of harm to the listed building. A second application is currently under consideration.
  - The PC contacted Laura Trott, our local MP, expressing our concerns over proposed changes to the planning system and the implications for the protection of Fawkham’s Green Belt. We are arranging a meeting with her to discuss our concerns further, and hoping to arrange for her to visit Fawkham later in 2021.

- **Neighbourhood Plan:** FPC resolved in December 2020 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Fawkham. This is a legal document that gives a community a say in what new development looks like, what green spaces it would like to protect, and a legal say in local planning matters. It can be a powerful tool to guide future development.
  - A variety of steps were taken to seek residents' views on this proposal. In November a leaflet was delivered to all houses, outlining what a NP is, the benefits and the implications, including cost. We offered various ways of contacting us: meetings, by email, by letter or by phone. We also posted three times to the Fawkham Community Facebook Group and sent two emails a "Fawkham residents" email list comprising 37 households. We held two Zoom meetings in December, attended by 16 residents.
  - We received 12 letters/emails/messages from households in favour of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, and four letters of objection from residents: two from residents and two from residents related to a landowning business. This means three times as many messages supporting the plan were received compared to those opposing it.
  - A Steering Group comprising PC Members and residents has been established and is working to develop an evidence base. If you would like to get involved, please let us know.
  - More information can be found here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/neighbourhood-plan/>
- **Highways:** issues with 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 time to helping to address these issues.
  - As residents will know, a long awaited resurfacing of part of Valley Road (from Sun Hill to Scudders Hill) was carried out and rapidly failed. Remedial works were delayed several times due to weather conditions and finally took place in April 21. The Parish Council liaised with KCC Highways throughout this process, and strongly expressed residents' disappointment with the quality of the work that was done.
  - We updated our Highways Improvement Plan submitted to KCC, using information from traffic counts conducted at the end of 2019. KCC has agreed to undertake a formal review of the speed limits along Valley Road, and further traffic counts will take place in June 2021. A serious accident on Valley Road heightened concerns over the speed and volume of traffic on the road and we will keep you updated on the outcome. It is important that all accidents are reported to the Police, especially if they involve any personal injury. It is these crash data statistics that are used to direct the available funds to the areas that need it the most.
  - We have been supporting a resident in a complaint to Thames Water regarding the lack of planned maintenance of the sewer system, and the resulting all-too-frequent flooding of Valley Road with foul water. Laura Trott MP has been approached and is also supporting this issue.
  - 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
  - Further details can be found here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/issues-with-fawkhams-roads-and-what-we-are-doing-to-try-to-help/>

- **New Website:** All Parish Councils needed to make sure their websites met new Accessibility Regulations during 2020. We used this as a good opportunity to build a new website, with a modern design and expanded content. This was launched in the summer and can be found here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk>. The content was prepared by the Chair and Clerk, and I would like to thank Christopher Proudfoot for his contributions to the History and Notable Buildings sections. The cost of constructing the new website were refunded to the PC by a grant from Kent County Council.
- **Parish in Bloom:** Fawkham entered Parish in Bloom for the first time, which is run by South and South East In Bloom. PC Members planted over 500 daffodil and tulip bulbs by the two village signs, next to benches on the green and in the churchyard, with further planting by the two village gateways at the entrances to the village. The assessment had to occur in writing, without a visit from a judge. We are pleased to say that Fawkham received a Silver Award. <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/parish-in-bloom/>
- **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 or blockages.
- **Fawkham's War Memorial:** was listed by Historic England, and, although the Remembrance Service could not go ahead, we were able to decorate it with poppies knitted by friends of the village, and wreath was laid and donation made to the British Legion on behalf of the village.
- **Fawkham Village Hall:** the Parish Council became the sole trustee of the village hall charity in November 2019 and now manages the hall.
  - For much of the year, the hall had to be closed but it was available to hirers when possible. An extensive refurbishment took place during 2020, including a new kitchen, new ladies/gents/accessibility toilets, the installation of a baby changing unit, new flooring throughout, new steel external fire doors, new cork boarding for notice boards and internal redecoration. Funding came from three sources: £7,000 from the Parish's Community Infrastructure Levy (which is money charged on development within the parish), a KCC Member's Grant of £10,000 from David Brazier, and the balance from the hall's reserve funds.
  - The hall has a good level of regular hirers and its income is forecast to more than cover the annual running costs. A full report on the village hall will be prepared for its AGM in June and will be posted here:<https://fawkhampc.org.uk/village-hall/>.

