

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2023 - REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, FAWKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Fawkham Parish Council (FPC) consists of five voluntary Councillors. We are one of the smallest Parish Councils in Kent.

The five Members are: Laura Evans (Chair), Maxine Fothergill, Will Johnstone, James Cherry and Laura Marchant. We express thanks to Lucie Sleeman, who served as a Councillor during the past year, and to Laura Marchant who is standing down at the May election.

Our clerk is Grace Champion. Grace joined us in September 2021 and is employed for eight hours a week, and works hard for the benefit of our community.

Parish Council meetings are held at least monthly in the village hall, which members of the public are always 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 last 12 months is given below:

- **Extension of the 30mph speed limit:** We are very pleased that the 30mph limit was extended northwards from the junction with Speedgate Hill, past the school and village hall to the property called Crispens. This follows 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. In addition, FPC ensured that the road markings at the start of the 30mph zone/end of the national speed limit zone close to the village green were upgraded. The cost of this, at just below £9,000, was met from FPC's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, rather than from the precept.
- **Neighbourhood Plan:** FPC resolved in December 2020 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Fawkham Parish. This is a document that gives a community a legal say in local planning matters, and can be a powerful tool to guide future development. Last year:
 - A residents' workshop was held in July looking at what residents value about Fawkham under a number of themes including Fawkham's character, heritage, community facilities, housing, business and the natural environment. The meeting helped to develop a deeper understanding of what is important to residents and to create a 'vision' for the future of Fawkham, which will set the framework for our Neighbourhood Plan and ensure it reflects what the community wants and needs.
 - A stall was manned at the church fete in June, providing an overview of our progress and to gather people's thoughts and opinions.
 - A workshop for residents was held in February, seeking views and thoughts on our local landscape.
 - A Business Survey was delivered to all houses and businesses in the Parish to gather information about the level of employment the Parish supports, and also to see if businesses have any future needs or aspirations that the Neighbourhood Plan may be able to help with.
 - The Steering Group continued to develop the evidence base of information about the Parish, 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.
 - If you would like to get more involved with 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 Plan:** FPC responded to Sevenoaks District Council's (SDC) initial Regulation 18 consultation on the emerging Local Plan, which included draft policies and non-Green Belt sites assessed as suitable for development. A further consultation is expected this autumn which will include Green Belt sites.
- **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 25 applications were considered and commented on by the Parish Council, plus a number of planning conditions were also commented upon, including those for Fawkham Manor's redevelopment and Salts Farm depot. A detailed planning application for Salts Farm depot is awaited.
 - FPC also commented on two major planning applications just outside our boundary: Millwall FC's training ground in West Kingsdown, and Wessex Solar Energy Farm at Horton Wood. The later includes a transmission station within the Parish and Wessex Solar Energy has signed an undertaking with the Parish Council to provide £50,000 of funds once the solar farm begins to export electricity and a further £5,000 pa for the life of the farm, which is expected to be 40 years. The PC has undertaken to spend the funds on improving community facilities within the Parish and will carefully consider how best to direct these funds.
 - The PC has raised various concerns with Planning Enforcement during the year which SDC are/have investigated, with further action to be taken where required.
- The **Queen's Platinum Jubilee** was celebrated with an event held on Small Grains on 5th June, for which over 150 tickets were booked. Thank you to all those who contributed to the GoFundMe appeal which enabled us to purchase jubilee momentos for children and prizes for the winners of the fancy dress, cake making and best decorated house competitions. And a big thank you to all our wonderful committee of volunteers who worked with us tirelessly up to and including on the day. Later on in the year, FPC placed a Book of Condolence in St. Mary's Church for those who wanted to express their condolences following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
- We continued to express our concerns to SDC over the parking arrangements at **Small Grains**, and the maintenance/appearance of the amenity green space, given the infrequent grass cuts, lack of removal of cuttings and cars being driven over it/parked on it. We are pleased to say that SDC agreed we could fund additional grass cuts by our contractor, and these began in March 2023, meaning the area will be able to be better used. We continue to seek a solution to the parking issues, ideally by the creation of a dedicated, suitably-surfaced parking area and protection of the remaining green space.
- **Other highways issues:**
 - concerns over Fawkham's roads and lanes featured prominently in the Parish Survey of 2019 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 prepared a new **Highways Improvement Plan**, submitted to KCC, and met with a Community Engagement Officer who we took on a tour of the lanes so he could see the issues for himself. 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.

- 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 and make improvements to reduce the **surface water flooding** experienced in the Parish. New gullies have been installed around the junction of Fawkham Green Road and the village green, and further drainage work has taken place at the junction of Billet Hill and Fawkham Green Road.
 - We also persuaded KCC to clean out the **ponds** at Scudders Hill and Castle Hill which are used for road drainage.
 - 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/>.
 - Our KCC Councillor agreed to fund FPC's request for a **salt bin** at the top of Scudders Hill, at its junction with Three Gates Road.
 - We continue to request **litter picks** of the Valley Road from Sevenoaks District Council every 6-7 months.
- After a spate of **garden break in and thefts**, the Police and SDC's Community Safety Officer attended an FPC meeting in January 2023 to provide residents with an update. The police advised that if a crime is in progress a resident should call 999. They also emphasised the importance of reporting any suspicious incidents to them, however trivial they may seem, as they help to build up a picture. Incidents can be reported online here: <https://www.kent.police.uk/ro/report/>.
 - FPC installed a **new defibrillator** outside Fawkham Village Hall, meaning there are now four defibrillators in Fawkham. All are accessible 24 hours a day with full instructions provided with the machines. You can find them outside: the village hall, the Rising Sun, Corinthian Sports Club and Speedgate Saddlery. FPC is hosting a CPR/defibrillator training session in April.
 - **Fawkham's Remembrance Service:** a wreath was laid and a donation made to the British Legion on behalf of the Parish, and the war memorial and Parish signs were again decorated with knitted and crocheted poppies. We would like to thank Peter Cronk who has continued to provide and look after the planting around the war memorial, which is very much appreciated.
 - **The Christmas tree lights switch on: A time capsule** to mark the end of the second Elizabethan era was buried when the Christmas tree lights were switched on. It contains a variety of information, including what Fawkham was like in 1952 and 2022, the coronation fetes of 1953, a photo of the Book Of Condolence for the Queen's death, information about Fawkham Rocks, the Covid pandemic, Words of the Year for 2022, shopping receipts, the current cost of living crisis, photos of the Parish, items from this year's Platinum Jubilee celebration, and much more. The idea is that it will be opened in 50 years time or on the Coronation of King George VII, whichever comes first. Some of the contents are shown below, and more details can be found on our website here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/fawkham-parish-time-capsule/>. **Chocolate packs** were handed out to children (and a similar number donated to the Community Cupboard food bank). The Rising Sun Inn again kindly provided mulled wine and mince pies in the pub afterwards. **Easter chocolates** for children were also left by the Easter bunny on both village greens.
 - Fawkham Parish Council was successful in obtaining funding from SDC as part of the countrywide Welcome Back Fund which aims to help "build back better" from the pandemic. PC members assembled and installed two **picnic benches, a bench and a children's bench** on Small Grains and the village green outside the pub.
 - Through FPC's representation on the Brands Hatch Liaison Committee, we were able to secure a **funding opportunity for the Friends of Fawkham school towards the new adventure playground** via the Villagers' Day, at which £2084 was raised.

- **Lorry Watch:** 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/>
- We provided SDC with a list of **road name signs** which were damaged or missing and are pleased to see that SDC has replaced the missing ones.
- **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 by KCC on the diversion to SD163 at Cross House. The public footpaths can be seen here:<https://fawkhampc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Fawkham-footpaths-with-numbers-pdf.pdf>
- **Wildflower planting:** wildflowers have been sown and maintained on the triangle of land at the junction of Rogers Wood Lane and Gallows Wood, and at Baldwins Green, and should flower again in 2023. We also took part in No Mow May, leaving the village green uncut for May, and encouraged residents to not mow their own grass.
- After carefully assessing the costs we anticipate will need funding by the **Parish precept**, we were pleased to advise you that the total amount is less than last year's figure. The Band D rate is £70.89, a reduction of 9.5% compared to last year, which is understood to be the second largest reduction in Parish precept within Sevenoaks District. FPC received a payment from South East Water of £2,500 in recognition of the water supply problems experienced by some residents last summer, and has used this money in full to reduce the amount of funding required from residents through the precept.
- **Fawkham Village Hall:** FPC is the sole trustee for the village hall. The hall has a good level of regular hirers although the recent vast increase to the cost of electricity may mean income over the next year will fall below that of the annual running costs. 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 an extensive consultation programme with the community and other stakeholders on the draft Plan document.

We are also looking forward to celebrating the **King's Coronation**, with a family event planned for May 6th.

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

We await SDC's second "Reg 18" consultation on the **Local Plan** which will include any Green Belt sites assessed as suitable for development. This is expected in the autumn, and we will keep residents informed about this. 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 2023