

# FRENSHAM PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17

## The Council

At the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May 2016, which marked the start of the new local council year, Dick Beales was elected as Chairman and Pam Andrews as Vice-Chairman. Mike Millerchip resigned from the Council in August, having served as a councillor for 29 years, of which the last 14 had been as Chairman. Mike was presented with a Past Chairman's Badge at a farewell ceremony, held in October, to mark his long service.

In November, we welcomed Simon Bleach as a new councillor, co-opted to fill the casual vacancy created by Mike's departure. This brought the Council back to its full complement of seven councillors (four for the Frensham Ward and three for the Rushmoor Ward). Brief biographies of all may be seen on the Council's website ([www.frensham-pc.gov.uk](http://www.frensham-pc.gov.uk)). Councillors are elected representatives rather than volunteers, although of course they are neither paid nor receive any allowances.

At last year's Annual Assembly we introduced Stephanie Spence, who had been recruited as an Administrative Assistant to our long-serving Clerk, Kate Shipton. Unfortunately for us, but fortunately for her, Stephanie recently secured a full time position with Farnham Town Council and left us at the end of March. We wish her well. We welcomed her successor Rachel Audsley, who is also the Clerk to Tilford PC, in early April. The Clerk's office is subject to a substantial administrative burden, not only in meeting the needs of the Council and in dealing with community affairs, but also in satisfying the bureaucratic requirements of local authorities.

The Council's meeting room has been well used during the year, not only for meetings of the Council and its committees and working groups, but also as a polling station and as a quiet meeting place for committees of local charitable organisations. It has also been used for meetings between the Council and Waverley Borough Council (WBC), and for liaison meetings with neighbouring parish councils. It is also, of course, the Parish Office. If your organisation wishes to use it, please contact the Clerk ([clerk@frensham-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@frensham-pc.gov.uk)).

In setting the parish precept component of the Council Tax, the Council has, over the years, kept the increase as low as possible consistent with immediate needs and diminishing income from higher tiers of local government. The consequence of this, however, has been that the Council's reserves are modest, and it cannot take on any major maintenance works or new projects without grant funding from external sources. Notwithstanding this, the Council has had a busy year.

## Planning

One of the most time-consuming activities for those councillors who served on the **Planning, Environment & Highways Committee** was, as usual, the scrutiny of all planning applications within the parish and the provision of comments on each to WBC's Planning Service. The Committee also kept a watching brief on applications just beyond the parish boundary, and where these had implications for Frensham made representations to the relevant authorities.

The Committee met every three weeks and dealt with over sixty **planning applications**, with some of the more contentious ones requiring substantial investigation and written comment and, when necessary, attendance at planning committees in Godalming. As is inevitable in a small community, applicants were sometimes well known both to their neighbours and to councillors, potentially giving rise to some awkwardness where objections were felt to be justified. The Committee has at all times, however, tried to be punctilious in presenting fair and objective representations to WBC's Planning Service, based on evidence and material planning considerations only. It encourages others to do likewise.

We participated in a recently formed 'Chairmen's Group' of neighbouring parish councils (Churt, Docketfield, Elstead, Frensham, Tilford and Thursley). Among other things, the group engaged with the Head of WBC's **Planning Service** to discuss the parishes' concerns over the handling of planning applications, and to explore ways in which representations by councils might make a greater impact in decision making. The group also aimed to better understand the planning process, the constraints

under which the Planning Service is operating, and how a more constructive relationship with the parishes might be developed.

In response to WBC's consultation on the draft **Pre-submission Local Plan (Part 1 – Strategic Policies and Sites)** the Council submitted its view that WBC was mistaken in not implementing the recommendation of its consultants to extend the Green Belt to the western part of the parish from The Long Road in Rowledge southwards into Dockenfield. This was one of three areas identified by the consultants for possible addition to the Green Belt, and was the only one rejected by WBC, the reason given being that there were no development pressures or exceptional circumstances justifying it. We disagreed, and are continuing to pursue this through our links to borough councillors. Part 2 of the new Local Plan (Non-strategic Policies and Sites), which is likely to contain detail of more interest to us, is scheduled to go out for consultation later in 2017. We shall continue to keep a close watch on developments and will make additional representations as necessary.

In March 2016 we and many others were surprised by media publicity about WBC's proposal to launch an £800,000 project to upgrade and expand the amenities at the **Frensham Great Pond Visitor Centre**. The Council engaged with the National Trust (the landowner), with WBC (the lessee and manager), and with local stakeholders, both in correspondence and at meetings. Our principal objection was that this was an unnecessarily grandiose scheme, apparently driven by commercial considerations, which would be inappropriate for this site. We felt that the increased visitor pressure generated would put at risk the vulnerable and heavily protected habitats on the Common. At a meeting with our Council in March this year, WBC explained that following wide consultation in 2016 they were starting afresh, and that options for a scaled down scheme were currently with the National Trust for consideration. We were assured that there would be further rounds of community consultation as possible alternative designs were developed. Completion is not expected before mid-late 2019.

The Council worked closely with Surrey Community Action (SCA) on a parish-wide survey to enable us to assess the possible need for **affordable housing** in the parish and to provide more general information towards a revised and updated version of the **Village Design Statement**. There was a good response to the survey questionnaire with 193 (28%) out of 683 forms being returned. These included a large number of constructive comments from residents on a wide range of local matters, which will provide the Council with food for thought as it works to maintain and, where possible, improve the environment and quality of life in the parish. The postal survey and the analysis of questionnaires was undertaken by SCA at no cost to the parish, for which we are most grateful. The survey report, which contains much of interest, has been published on the Council's website.

### Environment

We continued to implement the **Shortfield Common Management Plan** (see FPC's website) and were pleased to be informed by Surrey Wildlife Trust (on behalf of the Surrey Local Sites Partnership) that the Common had been selected as a **Site of Nature Conservation Importance** (SNCI). A new traditional-style **fingerpost** was installed on the Common at the West End Lane/Hamlash Lane crossroads in August. **Working parties** of up to fifteen volunteers met on three occasions in early 2017 to continue to clear invasive secondary growth, mainly holly, in the woodland, so as to allow more sunlight to reach the ground and to reveal some fine specimens of oak, ash and Scots pine. A **tree safety survey** of the Common was undertaken in February/March 2016, with recommended remedial works being undertaken by a contractor in the 2016/17 winter months. **Grass cutting**/collecting took place as usual in late summer so as to allow late-flowering plants to set seed. Over 100 species of wildflowers have been identified on the Common. A small group of local volunteers once again undertook systematic weekly monitoring of **butterfly** species and numbers on the Common from April to September, with the records being entered on to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme database. Several residents on the edge of the Common carried out minor maintenance works (grass patching, path mowing etc) for which we were most grateful.

There is a growing body of evidence that certain chemical **pesticides** can cause harm both to human (particularly children's) health and to the environment. In view of this, and taking advice from Pesticide Action Network UK, the Council has resolved, as a precautionary measure, to phase out, by May 2018, the use of such pesticides (principally glyphosate) on land which it owns and manages.

The Council was formally consulted by the Environment Agency (EA) about an application by Frensham Country Parks Ltd to discharge secondary treated **sewage effluent** from a controversial new 'mobile' home park (at Symondstone Farm in Headley Parish) into the Whitmore Vale Stream,

which feeds into Frensham Great Pond. This continues to cause much local concern and the Council, along with many others, submitted an objection to the EA.

The Council was again represented on the **Alice Holt Community Forum**, which engages with the Forestry Commission and the South Downs National Park Authority on matters relating to the management of the forest and its recreational facilities.

### Highways

We kept in regular touch with our County Councillor David Harmer over highways matters in the parish. Once again we took an active part in SCC's **Western Villages Highways Task Group** which he chairs, and put in our bids for funding of small capital projects within the parish. As usual, however, we were in competition with neighbouring parishes against a small pot of money. Last year we were successful in securing funding for feasibility studies for improved traffic flows at Millbridge (on both sides of the A287), and for safety improvements (additional signage and road markings) in the Jumps Road/Tilford Road area in Rushmoor where there have been numerous collisions. We shall follow both of these up and press for early implementation of the recommendations. For 2017/18 we have put in a high priority bid for a northbound 30mph vehicle activated sign on the A287 as it approaches Millbridge, to match the southbound one installed in 2015/16.

Rushmoor residents and councillors have been actively involved in securing historical right-of-way access from Tilford Road to Hankley Common at Rushmoor, by means of a Map Modification Order for **SCC Bridleway No. 587 (Frensham)**. The Order was made by SCC but was appealed by the landowner. A public inquiry is to be held by an inspector in the Marindin Hall on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017. The Parish Council strongly supports confirmation of the Order and will be represented at the inquiry. We hope that there will be many other supporters present.

The Council was pleased to be able to provide a small grant to the Countryside Restoration Trust (CRT) towards the cost of creating a **permissive footpath** from The Reeds Road to Ellel Ministries. This provides an alternative pedestrian route avoiding dangerous traffic in the Back Lane/The Reeds Road area at Millbridge. This excellent community project was undertaken by volunteers from the village, from Ellel Ministries, and from the CRT.

### Recreation

The **Hollowdene Recreation Ground** took up, as usual, a great deal of the Clerk's time (and the Council's financial resources) in managing contracts and in liaising with the sports clubs, other users and neighbours. This year the Council took steps to try to develop closer relationships with the clubs (mainly tennis, football, bowls and cricket). To this end, our **Recreation Ground & Pavilion Committee** was expanded to form a **Hollowdene Users Group (HUG)** which included both councillors and representatives of the clubs. This has resulted in improved opportunities for dialogue over the use, management, and development of the amenities.

The Council launched an initiative to develop a vision and **long-term strategy** for the Hollowdene so that existing facilities can be proactively and efficiently managed and maintained in the short to medium term, and that any additional or replacement facilities required for the longer term can be planned, resourced, and provided in a timely way. The strategy will also consider a long-term plan for tree succession planting. The initiative will be taken forward by a HUG working group for completion this year.

The entrance to the **Hollowdene car park** was resurfaced with concrete in October, as it had become badly potholed, and the stoned areas were levelled. The cost was shared between the Council and the sports clubs. Other repairs to the entrance structures were undertaken and new signage installed.

As at Shortfield Common, a **tree safety survey** on the recreation ground was undertaken by a specialist consultant in early 2016, with remedial works following at the end of the year. All surveyed trees have now been numbered with aluminium tags to facilitate future monitoring and maintenance. Tree safety surveys are undertaken by the Council every 3-4 years.

The **children's playground** at the Hollowdene was maintained by a contractor throughout the year on a monthly basis. The annual RoSPA inspection of the playground and adult fitness equipment took place in August, with the prioritised recommendations being implemented on a continuing basis.

## Community projects

The Council established a more visible presence at the **Frensham Fayre** this year, sharing a tent with organisations with which it has close associations: Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE); Tilford & Rushmoor Neighbours' Scheme (TARNS); Tilford & Rushmoor Tennis Club; and Frensham Neighbourhood Watch. It attracted considerable attention and in view of positive public feedback, we intend to have a similar presence at this year's Fayre.

Councillors organised **litter picking** outings in both parish wards during the year. Litter picking tongs, high-vis waistcoats and bin bags are available on loan from the Clerk for anybody who would like to organise a litter pick. We can also arrange with WBC to collect the bags if necessary.

The Council organised a series of quarterly **community breakfasts** at St Mary's Church Hall on Saturday mornings. These informal gatherings enabled local people of all ages to socialise with neighbours old and new and catch up on local issues over tea and toast.

A second **defibrillator** was purchased by the Council during the year and is located in the porch at St Mary's Church. Fortunately, the unit located at the community building in Shortfield, was not required, but remains ready for use at all times.

The **red phone box project** continued to make progress, with the benefit of a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. We hope that the three boxes will be completed and in use by the end of the year.

The Council's '**Frensham in Bloom**' team continued to improve the look of the villages by planting bulbs at the War Memorial, around signposts and in other prominent positions, and by stocking and maintaining planters at the Community Building.

A new Parish Council **Notice Board** was erected near St Mary's Church, bringing the total in the parish to five (St Mary's; Hollowdene; Community Building; Shortfield Common; and Rushmoor).

## Challenges for 2017/18

As Waverley's new **Local Plan** takes shape and as the march of housing development southwards from Farnham continues, planning issues will inevitably take up much of our time. We shall continue to engage with WBC in trying to secure for the local community a satisfactory outcome to the **Frensham Great Pond** facilities upgrade that will be acceptable to local users while not compromising the vulnerable habitats and wildlife on the Common. We shall be taking close account of the outcome of the household survey in developing our forward programme, including the revision of the **Village Design Statement** and the formulation of a medium- to long-term **strategy for the Hollowdene**. We shall also be considering with the appropriate authorities a number of local **traffic issues**, including the environmental impact of uncontrolled use of **Byway No 520** (the BOAT) by cross-country vehicles on Frensham Common, and the ever-increasing problem of **on-street parking** congestion particularly in the Shortfield Common area. Fund raising and planning for an upgrade of the **children's playground** at the Hollowdene will also be on our agenda for the year.

## Acknowledgements

There is always a risk, when singling out individuals for thanks, that some will inadvertently be overlooked. So first of all I would like to thank all those **members of the community**, unnamed here, who engaged with and supported the Council in various ways during the year.

We are grateful to our Clerk, **Kate Shipton**, for continuing to give the Council the benefit of her long experience and local knowledge, and her ability to attract grant funding. Our thanks also go to **Stephanie Spence**, who provided efficient administrative support over the time she was with us. Thanks also to our **Councillors**, especially those who found time to devote to specific projects and to serving the community in other ways; to **Sue Green** who managed our website; to **Guy Olden** who contributed to the Planning Committee as a co-opted member and who managed many of the Council's small projects; to **Len Davis** who helped with the accounts; and to **Colin Hall** (CPRE) who advised the Council on planning and countryside matters. We are also grateful to our Surrey County Councillor, **David Harmer**, for his constant support and advice.

Dick Beales  
5th April 2017