

# FITTLEWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

## Report to the Annual Parish Meeting, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2008, by the Chairman of Fittleworth Parish Council

### Introduction

You will probably remember that in May 2007, for the first time in decades, Fittleworth experienced a full election of Parish Councillors because there were more candidates than places. At the time there was much debate as to whether this was the sign of a vibrant village community or the result of a small clique of one-dimensional villagers trying to wrest control from the previous council. The resultant election saw five newcomers taking their seats alongside four of the old guard. I trust that the following report will go some way towards indicating whether the voters of Fittleworth chose wisely or not.

The Parish Council has held formal meetings on the third Monday of every month of the past year except August, which has traditionally been a fallow month. Mike Allin, Julie Hawkins and John Mills have been present on all eleven occasions, Susanne Dipper on ten, Alan Butcher, Paul Stanforth and myself on nine, Hazel Barkworth on eight and Ian Robertson, harassed by business commitments, on six. Statistically that means that, overall, your representatives have an 85% attendance record, and that at each of the possible meetings an average of just under eight of the nine were present. When you consider that the regulations under which we operate, recognising the vagaries of Parish Councils, require a quorum of only three to give a council meeting validity, you will realise that the attendance of Fittleworth councillors is pretty impressive. I would also add, indeed stress, that our Parish Clerk, Peter Henderson, has a record of 100% attendance. We all extend our thanks to Janet Duncton, our District Councillor, for her presence at most meetings, to her and her husband Chris, our County Councillor, for advice and support, and to John Butler for his exceptional loyalty and support.

### Whole Council Activities

Some activities involve all councillors. We have an extremely effective contact system by which each councillor adopts a section of the village, allowing delivery to every household in the parish including Bedham and Coates. This we used in July for the appeal to villagers to write about the proposal to exclude Fittleworth from the South Downs National Park, and for the questionnaire on housing last autumn. In similar fashion we divide the village into sectors for rapid surveys and, most recently, for spring-cleaning the roads and hedgerows, litter-picking in advance of the open gardens. Because

councillors have pulled their weight the systems have worked well, and you can take heart, and congratulate yourselves, on the fact that Fittleworth had greater impact on the National Park consultation than any other parish. Groups of councillors have also given up time and energy in, for instance, clearing the playground of leaves (Oct.) and digging out the Alley Dick ditch

### Shared Responsibility

The Parish Council owns land and property; all councillors therefore share responsibility for Health and Safety around the village, and one, two or three work together and report regularly on each of the recreation ground, the playground, Hesworth Common & Birchwalk Woods, the triangle which includes the bowling green and rifle range, the pavilion, the arch and the centenary garden. The constant need for maintenance therefore remains uppermost in our minds, and while some of this has to be contracted out (removal of 100 foot beech trees being a case in point), a great deal of maintenance is done 'in-house'; in this connection I should like to pay tribute especially to Mike Allin, who has taken most of this work on his shoulders for many years, and to John Mills who has ably and increasingly shared the burden during the last twelve months.

Possibly as onerous is the task of scrutinising all planning applications in the parish, visiting the properties and reporting back to CDC. This year we have had a veritable flood of applications, 51 all told. Alan Butcher has been tireless in organising the planning subcommittee, loyally backed by Mike Allin, John Mills and Susanne Dipper, visiting the properties and writing up the council's views. They have had occasion to object to six developments over the year, and have occasionally attended meetings of Chichester's Area Committee North to make direct representations for or against developments.

### Working Parties

Early in the life of this new Council, Paul Stanforth suggested that an effective way of taking forward the 2005 Parish Action Plan might be to set up working parties, each headed by a Parish Councillor but staffed by interested villagers, covering the main areas of development. Five working parties were duly established: Youth under Susanne Dipper, Community Involvement under Julie Hawkins, Communications under Ian Robertson, Housing Development under Paul himself, and Traffic under me. I am indebted to them for material for the following brief reports:-

The **Youth** working party aims to capitalise on the building of the children's playground by providing facilities for the over-12s. Villagers, including Veronica Smith who did so much for the playground, and the vicar have met on several occasions with the headmaster Graham Bloomfield, who is enthusiastic for

young village teenagers to use the school facilities including the front playground for football and basketball, and the hall (and possibly the computers) as part of a regular evening slot. A pizza evening attracted ten youngsters who agreed that they did not want a Youth Club as such. Discussion of a possible future programme resulted in a minibus-full visiting Laserquest in Guildford and the presence of the purple bus in February, March and April. A committee meeting in the next week will plan summer activities, to include hiring outdoor sports equipment, planning and manning a stall at the Village Fete, bowling, climbing wall etc. Any interested youngsters or their parents are warmly invited to register names and contact numbers with Susanne Dipper or Liz Nicholson.

The **Community Involvement** working party is made up of 5 villagers, 2 parish councillors, the vicar and the headmaster. They have looked at many of the issues affecting our community and have chosen to focus for the next six months on two that will benefit the community as a whole: to reinstate a welcome pack for newcomers to the village; and to establish a volunteer network. They are also looking at other issues such as a possible community defibrillator, promotion of village clubs, organisations and amenities, and of course playing a major part in the coming Fête.

While the **Communications** working party is also concerned with aspects of community involvement, contact between villagers being of the essence, its main concern thus far has been to set up a Fittleworth website. It is clear that this is best achieved through Chichester as part of the CDC website, and Chichester is keen that we should work with them; as a result we have to wait our turn but I understand that we are at the vanguard after Midhurst.

The **Housing Development** working party successfully initiated the housing survey mentioned above to clarify perceived housing needs and residents' views regarding the development of in-fill, brown-field and green-space land within the village. Approximately 100 homes completed the survey and the consensus was that we should restrict the building of new homes to no more than 10 affordable houses and that none should be built on green field land in the village. This recommendation was ratified by the Parish Council and communicated to Chichester District Council.

Because the CDC's Core Strategy was judged unsound last year (June 2007), they had to abandon their plans, including those for housing development, and they are now starting the process of consultation with parishes. The timing of our Fittleworth survey enabled us to take the initiative. In fact we were the first village to have an open meeting with CDC

representatives, a meeting which was well attended; many thanks to all those who took the time to come along. This working party is currently linking with the others on a draft discussion document to cover all aspects of village life (not just housing!) and hopes to have this ready for viewing at the Village Fête on 9<sup>th</sup> August. It will also maintain close communications with CDC and has asked them to a further meeting with the Parish Council in late summer.

The **Traffic** working party, consisting of 16 villagers, has met five times since its inauguration in November last year, and has taken up the cudgels from the traffic forum which had been operating two or three years earlier. While it has helped its members to understand the restrictions under which highway management operates, it has also pursued four main areas: the identification of firms whose HGVs habitually use the village; the problem of speed on the A283 and B2138; possible improvements to Hallelujah Corner and the School Lane/Lower Street junction; and a long-term vision of how to create a village atmosphere which causes drivers to respect our village space. We have a meeting with the WSCC Highways representative in June.

**Other representation:** Councillors also take on membership of other bodies. For at least as long as I have been in Fittleworth Mike Allin has chaired the committee which manages the 100 acres of Hesworth Common, helped in particular by Hazel Barkworth and recently also by Susanne Dipper. He has asked me to express thanks to all those who donated money for the planting of saplings to commemorate the great storm of 1987. Checks are planned to ensure that the trees which have been planted have taken, and where necessary replanting will be carried out. The next working day is Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July, when areas of heathland will be prepared in advance of spraying the bracken later in the month. Birchwalks Wood will also be looked at to formulate a plan for opening up part of the wood for a commemorative seat with views to the Downs.

Julie Hawkins and I sit on the Village Hall committee, Susanne Dipper has taken over from me on the Fittleworth & District Association, and Paul Stanforth and I represent the Parish Council as required at meetings of Chichester District Council, and at the regular meetings of the North East Forum of Parish Councils and the Chichester District Association of Local Councils. That way we stay in touch with what is going on beyond the bounds of Fittleworth, and the advantages which may be available to us. In addition, Julie Hawkins is our link with the Sports and Social Club, and Hazel Barkworth has maintained her special concern for keeping pathways clear of litter and especially dog excrement.

## **Major initiatives**

Comparatively straightforward initiatives require attention throughout the year; thus the Council made representations about St Richard's Hospital, compiled and presented a flood-risk survey to CDC which is now with the Environment Agency, and has digested numerous reports.

Two major initiatives have occupied our attention in the last year. Plans for future housing was one, as indicated above. The second major concern has been the proposed South Downs National Park. Following years of consultation and a detailed report which recommended that all the AONB (and therefore Fittleworth) should be included within the proposed Park, the Government Inspector saw fit to recommend exclusion of the Western Weald including the Rother Valley and therefore our village. The stance of the Parish Council, identical from the word go to that taken by the Fittleworth & District Association, was that we would prefer that there should not be a National Park and that we should retain the protection afforded by our AONB status, but that, if there were to be a National Park, we had to be in it. To be outside would render us ripe for whole-scale development as we fear that funds would not be found for Park and AONB. We have accordingly argued for the retention of Fittleworth within the National Park boundary and supplied a detailed map of how that might be achieved. We have lodged a subsidiary argument for at least retention of our AONB status. It is thought that we might know the outcome before the end of the year. I should like to thank Susanne Dipper and David Connell in particular for their part in all this.

#### **Future Projects:**

You may be interested to know that plans are afoot for enhancement of the village, especially the centenary garden; another notice-board; replacement of decaying benches; refurbishment of the pavilion in which we are meeting at the moment; more extensive use of the parish office which opens from 8.30 to 9.30 on the first Monday of the month; more regular tidying of the village; and possibly a multi-purpose play area.

#### **The Council itself:**

Over this last year the Parish Council has decided to move towards Quality Council status. When this was first mooted, back in the days of the previous council, it was seen as a means of securing influence and cash; that council could not have qualified, however, because it lacked the requisite number of elected, as opposed to co-opted, members. The present council faces no such restrictions; it is also aware that added influence will be minimal and extra funds non-existent. Nevertheless we are seeking Quality Council status because the key man in all this, our clerk, is supremely competent and has undertaken full training; some councillors, Susanne Dipper, Paul Stanforth

and Hazel Barkworth, have been trained, and others will follow; and we think that you would like your Parish Council to be as efficient and competent as possible. Never forget that each of us is a volunteer; there is no remuneration and very little kudos; we all do the jobs we have taken on because we want to serve the community of Fittleworth more directly and because we have certain skills, interests and competencies. We could all resign tomorrow and have a lot more time to pursue our other interests. I trust we won't!

As indicated at the outset of this report, the council which was elected by the people of Fittleworth appeared to consist of two factions - the remains of the old guard and a new group apparently with its own agenda. My election as chairman of this disparate body was simply in the hope that I might bridge the divide; it was certainly not because I wanted the position.

It rapidly became evident that the fears people had about two factions were more imagined than real, and that there was a genuine desire on the part of every member to work together for the good of the village. I have been consistently impressed by the willingness of my colleagues to pull their weight, involve themselves in their various tasks, and grow into those tasks. My role has been made all the more easy thereby, and I should like to take this opportunity of thanking them publicly for their generous support. I trust that as this report comes to a close you will be persuaded that, as it turned out, the people of Fittleworth chose wisely.

#### **PARISH COUNCILLORS 2007-2008**

Chairman	Tony Poole	Sayers House, School Lane	865081
Vice Chair	Paul Stanforth	Limbourne Farm House	865702
	Mike Allin	Hunters Roost, Limbourne La.	865230
	Hazel Barkworth	Woodside Cottage, Lower St.	865268
	Alan Butcher	Woodfield, Limbourne Lane	865389
	Susanne Dipper	7, Coates Castle, Coates	865637
	Julie Hawkins	40, Greatpin Croft	865629
	John Mills	8, Greatpin Croft	865700
	Ian Robertson	Dovelet, Limbourne Lane	865468
	<b>Clerk to the Parish Council</b>		
	Peter Henderson	Dyers Cottage, Little Bognor	865058