

**Report to the Annual Parish Meeting, 18th May 2009,
by the Chairman of Fittleworth Parish Council**

Introduction

I am delighted to say at the very beginning of this report that I have again been really impressed by the willingness of every one of my colleagues to work together for the good of the village. For this, and for thereby making the task of chairing the council that much easier, I offer my unreserved thanks to all of them.

The Parish Council has again held formal meetings on the third Monday of every month of the past year except August, our fallow month. Mike Allin, John Mills and I have been present on all eleven occasions, Alan Butcher on ten, Susanne Dipper and Julie Hawkins on nine, and Hazel Barkworth and Paul Stanforth on eight. Ian Robertson, harassed by business commitments, resigned from the council in July, and John Barstow, returned unopposed in September, has a 100% attendance since then. On average, therefore, eight of the nine have been present at each meeting - a remarkable record when three is a quorum. I would also stress that our Parish Clerk, Peter Henderson, has a 100% attendance record. We also extend our thanks to Janet Duncton, our District Councillor, and her husband Chris, our County Councillor, for their presence at most meetings despite health problems and other commitments; and to John Butler, whose press reports are read avidly even beyond the confines of Fittleworth, for his continued loyalty and support.

Subcommittees: There are three Parish Council subcommittees; they deal with Finance, Planning and Hesworth Common. Somewhat illogically, but because **Finance** is so important, we all sit on that subcommittee which meets in December to set the budget for the following year. Last year our precept cost the average Fittleworth householder just under £29 a year against an average for the District of £38.50. This year, in view of the squeeze on everyone and despite increased costs, we have done some trimming and have managed not to increase the precept at all.

Alan Butcher has again been tireless in organising the **Planning Subcommittee**, loyally backed by Mike Allin, John Mills and, when family responsibilities permit, Susanne Dipper, visiting properties and writing up the council's views. They have only felt the need to object to applicants' proposals in 4 of some 50 cases; when they have done so

District Councillors have refused the applications or applicants have withdrawn their plans, which confirms what a sound job they are doing.

We expect the 100 acres of **Hesworth Common** to be there for us and possibly forget that the Parish Council has the responsibility for maintaining it, and that Mike Allin, who chairs the subcommittee which manages the Common, spends hours in meetings with Hazel Barkworth and Susanne Dipper and the advisors from the South Downs Conservation Group, walks the Common with them, organises the working parties and the Worthing volunteers, and has done so cheerfully for more than a decade. Most of the 57 trees planted to commemorate the great storm of 1987 have survived; the heather is a magnificent sight, re-establishing the heathlands of old; wild grasses have been sown where heather has not taken, bracken has been pulled and sprayed, birch scrub cleared and health and safety concerns - including illicit swings and holes in the car park - have been addressed. The next working party will be on Sunday 12th July meeting at 10.00 am in the Car Park for anyone willing to lend a hand.

All councillors have continued to share responsibility for health and safety around the village, reporting regularly on 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. During the year ownership of the recreation ground has been registered with the land registry, and we have clarified the position with regard to dog-walking: as things stand there is no by-law prohibiting dogs from the recreation ground, but there is a Chichester District Control Order that prohibits the fouling of any public area like the rec., and all footpaths. We have put up notices accordingly. Dogs are never allowed in the children's playground.

As part of their general oversight, councillors have also cleared the playground of leaves, cleaned out drains by the pavilion, twice cleared the eastern boundary ditch of the recreation ground of accumulated debris (some of it, believe it or not, dumped there by a villager!); and all of us litter-picked throughout the village as a precursor to the Open Gardens weekend. This is also an opportunity again to express our thanks to Nancy Allen for her efforts on the Alley Dick ditch. None of these are activities required or expected of a parish councillor (we would be perfectly entitled to put the work out to tender), but each case indicates our willingness to work for the good of the village. In particular I should like to stress the debt owed to Mike Allin and John Mills, often assisted by Alan Butcher, for the work they have done

around the pavilion and the village generally, saving hundreds of pounds in the process, and increasingly putting right what mindless individuals have put wrong through vandalism or thoughtless kicking of balls against the building.

Working Parties: The working parties set up last year, usually chaired by parish councillors but including a majority of interested villagers, have continued over the past twelve months. The **Housing Development** working party under Paul Stanforth has held several meetings with CDC representatives especially the rural housing enabler Sam Irving, as well as with parties interested in possible development locally. This provides very useful contact and a sounding-board while not yet committing the village or the parish council to anything. Chris Polden, Carolann Townsend and Neil Plumridge, among others, have played a full part.

The **Traffic** working party, which I chair, has also met on several occasions and with West Sussex with whom we have useful contact. Data on weight and speed of traffic has been requested and received, plans are afoot to make some speed signs clearer, to extend the small dolly posts in Lower Street and by the bridges to deter parking on the verges, to survey Hallelujah Corner and most important of all to widen the footway by Devon House. Many villagers come to meetings and contribute much, key among them being Robin Wilson and Cyril Stiling.

The **Youth** working party is chaired by Susanne Dipper with the school fully involved. Plans to develop a games / play area in the school playground for the evening use of older children have had to be temporarily shelved because of the school's own building plans, but the purple bus visited weekly from September to the end of the year, and events are planned for the summer. The football club kindly provided the small mobile goals which have been much used - recently vandalised. With Cubs, Scouts, Beavers, Brownies, Guides and Crusaders there is no lack of activity for young people in the village; one of the main problems is that those who complain that there's nothing to do are precisely those who don't like being organised.

The **Community** working party, chaired by Julie Hawkins and supported by Carolann, has found much of its time taken up with the successful Fête last year, planning the 2009 Fête (8th August) and preparing the pantomime for later in the year. Meanwhile their ambition is to develop a network of people in the village willing to keep an eye on and help with those in need, and to make available to new arrivals in the

village a pack of useful information which has already been put together by the church outreach group, especially Julie Jillians.

Finally members of the **Communications** working party, chaired by Neil Plumridge since the departure of Ian Robertson, have been fully involved in the development of the new-look Village Magazine and we owe a great debt of gratitude to Neil himself for creating the Fittleworth web site for the Parish Council (www.Fittleworth.info) which should increasingly provide a forum for ideas and information. The input of Margaret Welfare and Pam Wall has been most valuable.

Other representation: Councillors also take on membership of other bodies. Julie Hawkins and I sit on the Village Hall committee, Susanne Dipper 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 County Local Committee; Mike Allin and I attend meetings of the Chichester District Association of Local Councils whose secretary just happens to be John Barstow. John is also taking on the role of liaison with Chichester in areas concerning litter, graffiti and crime-prevention in general. In all these ways we stay in touch with what is going on beyond the bounds of Fittleworth, and the advantages which may be available to us.

Consultations: Consultation is the name of the game these days, and we have responded to 18 different requests for information or opinion in the course of the last 12 months, some of them very lengthy documents. The annual *Survey of Flooding* in Fittleworth is one of the consultations more immediately relevant to us in the village, and I thank those villagers who contributed photos and information. Thanks are also due especially to Paul Stanforth for organising the parish council presentations at the Fête and at the highly successful evening recently in the Village Hall.

General Points of Interest.

Paul Stanforth, Alan Butcher and Mike Allin are involved in discussions with the Sports and Social Club about the terms of the lease of this Pavilion due to be renewed in March 2010. This brings me to the subject of the Pavilion and the sums of money spent on it over recent months because the Parish Council owns this building. Since last May the doors and windows have been replaced round most of the west and north side of the building, and that work will be completed in the next few months at a total cost of approximately £7000. Two things have made

this possible: proper budgeting, for which our Clerk has been largely responsible, and the dedication especially of John Mills who has brought to the Council a special degree of expertise and drive in these matters.

You should be aware that Chichester's plans for housing development have again suffered a setback. In February the Highways Agency said it could not fund the planned upgrading of the A27 to motorway standard. At the same time the Environment Agency said it could not increase by much the amount of treated sewage that could be discharged into Chichester Harbour. Both these situations seriously affect the infrastructure required for housing development and therefore the ability of Chichester to build the proposed 9,600 new homes by 2026, 90% of them planned for the A27 corridor and the coastal plain. We need to keep ears close to the ground for any hints that Chichester might have to look north of the Downs for its development.

Partly in this context there was real jubilation when we learnt that, helped by the tremendous efforts of so many villagers, Fittleworth had established itself as worthy of inclusion in the new South Downs National Park. Together with others in the Western Weald we proved that Government does sometimes take note of people's views. As a result we shall not lose our status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the protection from over-development which that confers.

The most recent cause of real satisfaction concerns Quality Council Status. I said last year that our clerk, the key man in all this, was supremely competent. So it has proved. He has undergone considerable extra training, secured the necessary CiLCA qualification, and put together a detailed dossier on the activities and competencies of your Parish Council which has resulted in the award to us of Quality Status for the next four years. Not only is your Parish Council recognised as efficient and competent, there is an assurance - yet to be tested - that the larger local authorities will take more note of our views. Some cash advantages should filter down to us, and it is easier to secure grants for local developments. Indeed, following recent legislation we could, if we wished, borrow up to £500,000 over 50 years at 4.4% to support a failing shop or set one up, or build affordable units and run the development ourselves - none of which we plan to do, I hasten to say!

Future Projects: The general tidiness of the village has forced its way to the front of our minds and could well be the major concern for the coming year. We have already negotiated extra clearance of undergrowth and the digging out of ditches with Howards, the firm which generally maintains the recreation ground for us and keeps it looking

spick and span. It may have taken months to get the School Lane and other road signs replaced or repaired but we are getting there. Mud and debris needs to be cleared more regularly from footways and at least one finger-post needs replacing. The paling fence between the Alley Dick and Great Pin Croft is a collapsed eyesore, benches need cleaning and, in some cases, replacing, and the notice board needs an upgrade. Much of this is in hand, greatly enhanced by a very generous gift by a village benefactor. The centenary garden was tidied up by a group of youngsters last summer and has since been replanted in honour of the centenary of Guiding. We continue to benefit from Police activity checking speeds on The Fleet and Lower Street, and from their increased presence touring the village (though I accept you might not have seen the latter as much as you would wish).

If I may close by repeating what I said last year: '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!' Thank you for listening.

PARISH COUNCILLORS 2007-2008

Tony Poole	Sayers House, School Lane	Chairman
Paul Stanforth	Limbourne Farm House	Vice Chair
Mike Allin	Hunters Roost, Limbourne La.	
Hazel Barkworth	Woodside Cottage, Lower St.	
John Barstow	St Cleer, The Fleet,	
Alan Butcher	Woodfield, Limbourne Lane	
Susanne Dipper	7, Coates Castle, Coates	
Julie Hawkins	40, Greatpin Croft,	
John Mills	8, Greatpin Croft	

Clerk to the Parish Council

Peter Henderson Dyers Cottage, Little Bognor 865058