



## **FELPHAM PARISH COUNCIL**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT MAY 2022 – APRIL 2023 (Revised)**

#### **Introduction**

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, at the Annual Parish Council meeting I was honoured to once again be elected as Chair of Felpham Parish Council. I am grateful for the trust and confidence that my fellow Councillors have in my ability, commitment, and dedication to delivering the best I can for the Council and for Felpham and its residents.

I recognise that it is a team effort and that whilst inevitably there are differences of opinion, these are debated openly and fairly, and through the proper democratic process, adhering to policies, procedures, and standards. Supported by a strong office team we resolve these differences and work hard to ensure the Council meets its obligations fairly, robustly, and consistently.

In early 2023 the council adopted the Civility and Respect Pledge, further strengthening the need for councillors, staff, and members of the public to respect others and their opinions and not to be abusive or threatening. This is a national initiative and supports our own Code of Conduct, and our existing council policies and procedures.

In January 2023 we introduced our Warm Hub. This was supported by a grant and would allow the main lobby area and conference room at Felpham Community Hall, when not booked, to be freely accessible as a warm hub with hot drinks and light refreshments available. I visited the hub several times and was pleased to see people making use of this open space.

In March 2023 we held two drop in/open sessions in the community hall. Several members of the public visited, looked at the posters outlining some of our activities and engaged in detailed conversation about what it is we do, what we can do and how we operate. I was encouraged by this and hope more sessions can follow.

I would like to thank the respective Chairs of our Committees, Councillor Glen Hewlett for Planning, Licensing & Neighbourhood Plan, Councillor Matthew Copeland for Finance & Administration, Councillor Paul English for Allotments & Open Spaces and Councillor Gloria Moss for Projects and Resilience, and for her role as Vice Chair of the Council. Their governance of these Committees is invaluable.

It is through the Committees that the Parish Council conducts most of its business. Their effective performance, overseen by their respective Chairs, ensure we function to the best of our ability and is something which cannot be underestimated so I thank them for their efforts.

Late in 2021 we welcomed a new office team. As always with a new team it takes a while for people to become accustomed to their new roles. With a new structure in place to accompany our new team a period of bedding in and adjustment was expected. Ongoing monitoring and reviews, along with considering the needs and suggestions of the team, which had already made a positive impression, highlighted the need for further changes. A revised structure was put forward to the Council in May 2022. Following discussion, it was agreed to trial the revised structure from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022 for 3 months. A review took place in October 2022, and it was agreed the new structure and responsibilities worked well and would be formally adopted.

My thanks go to all Councillors and the office team who continue to give their time and effort in trying to ensure Felpham remains the place its residents want it to be.

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**Some key outputs from the committees during the period of this report:**

**Planning, Licensing & Neighbourhood Plan Committee**

Again, a busy year and the committee, chaired by Councillor Glen Hewlett responded to well over 100 planning applications.

The single biggest issue continues to be the proposed selling, and redevelopment, of the Golf Course. In addition to our initial 49 individual objections more have been added, now numbering nearly 60. At the time of writing this report we wait for ADC to make their decision.

We continue to watch closely and, when necessary, comment on the evolving development plans in neighbouring areas which might affect Felpham, and the road network in and around our village. This includes developments at Ford, Yapton, Bersted, Barnham and Middleton, as well as the continuing developments associated with the proposed Rampion 2 offshore wind farm.

Proposals for several major road schemes have also been closely monitored, specifically how they may affect the roads in and around Felpham. Most notably the plans for the A259 from Littlehampton to Flansham, the A27 and A29. We have attended consultation meetings associated with the proposed upgrade of the A259 and submitted comments accordingly.

We had the opportunity to comment on ADC's Planning Enforcement Compliance Strategy. We were highly critical of several areas of the proposal, especially in the areas of planning enforcement, where we considered the issue of inadequate staffing to be a real concern. ADC issued its final report in November 2022. This strategy will be the permanent solution and ADC's planning department will strive to return to a fully resourced service. It has been indicated that ADC's Planning Department will work more closely with Parish Councils in the future.

Our response to tree related applications benefits from having detailed and professional reports submitted by our tree warden. The quality of these submissions has been outstanding and received much praise from ADC officers. Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are also a particular topic being discussed regularly, both at this committee and at the Allotments committee meetings.

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## **Finance and Administration:**

This committee once again benefited from the chairmanship of Matthew Copeland. Strong management of the council's budgets is crucial and the results from the audits, and from the budget setting, all under the scrutiny of this committee, are testament to their application to this task.

### Council budgets

In deciding the budget for 2023/24 the council was acutely aware of the financial challenges facing everyone. The various committees carefully and diligently considered their respective budgets and put forward a budget for the coming year which gave a reduction of just under 5% on our precept figure. This clearly demonstrates that we are taking the approach that every penny counts and that we are doing everything we can to lessen any costs to our residents. Over the past few years we have exercised stringent control over our finances, constantly minimising any impact and in real terms this has resulted, when balanced against inflation, in a reduction of well over 20%.

### Grants

November 2022 saw us consider the grant applications. This is a difficult process and in deciding who is successful we apply a strict set of conditions which applicants must meet. Even though we are a large parish (5<sup>th</sup> out of 30 in Arun) our precept is one of the lowest when compared to other parishes, so we must exercise tight control over any award. Normally an awards evening is held in late April but this year, due to the elections taking place in May, we have posted the awards to the successful applicants.

### Community Hall:

The hall continues to benefit many groups, and others are constantly enquiring about availability. Running costs, and especially energy costs, are a concern, and we will continue to do all we can to ensure the hall offers great value for money. The investment in solar panels a few years ago is proving to have a significant effect on reducing our bills and the "payback" period is currently projected to be significantly less than was first expected.

### Audit

The Council and its financial affairs are subject to an interim independent audit as well as an annual independent audit in compliance with the standards applicable to local government organisations.

It was particularly pleasing to report that the auditors were satisfied that we are operating correctly and that our finances are well managed, and standards are being correctly applied.

Well done to the team, particularly given the changes in role and personnel over the past year or so.

### Staffing

May saw a proposal to reorganise the council's employment structure. This was fully discussed and approved by the committee, going to Main Council for final approval. This was done with a trial period of 3 months and in October it was fully adopted.

Since then the team has settled into the new structure and gained much experience. All the team have worked hard to obtain recognised qualifications in support of their role. They are proving to be a real benefit to the council and continue to support and advise councillors.

In the spring of 2023 they also faced, for them all a new experience, parish council elections. With it comes the prospect of new councillors from May and the need to support and integrate newly appointed councillors.

#### Traffic

The council was pleased to hear that the Community Highways Application for Firs Avenue and for a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) at Snooks Corner were both supported.

Firs Avenue relates to the provision of speed control measures, most likely speed humps, and the Snooks Corner TRO is for an extension of yellow lines from the corner to the bus stop. This corner, with the positioning of the bollards, makes it extremely difficult for larger vehicles to safely negotiate the corner, particularly when vehicles are parked close to the junction and the bollards. There have been repeated occasions when the bollards have been damaged.

#### Youth Club

In September 2022 we entered into a trial with Sussex Clubs for Young People (SCYP) to run a Friday youth club in the Community Hall. Our commitment to this trial is to provide the room and contribute towards the funding. It is subject to periodic review to determine its performance and effectiveness.

In December 2022 a progress meeting took place which indicated that whilst initially uptake was slow it was now showing real promise, with numbers almost at the maximum allowed by the levels of staffing. SCYP are actively recruiting and training more workers with the aim of increasing capacity.

A further termly report was submitted by the SCYP in March 2023 which again was positive, and indications are that this scheme is continuing to grow.

#### Council assets

The committee also continued to deal with ongoing maintenance of its registered assets.

Some of the council's assets or items which we maintain are as follows (this is not an exhaustive list):

Felpham Community Hall	5 Defibrillators
Allotment sites and other open spaces.	Silver Jubilee Stone and Plaque
Fisherman's Gardens	Village flagpole
Grassmere Parade	The Blue plaque trail
27 Footpath/street/prom lights	Several benches and picnic tables
12 Notice boards	3 WW1 Commemorative benches
2 Bus shelters	3 Street Planters
4 Gateway signs	2 Barbecues
Numerous trees across the parish.	Platinum and Coronation benches



Services for which we provide a financial contribution include the following (not an exhaustive list):

The ongoing provision of free parking at Grassmere and Links Avenue
The running costs of the Culver Road toilets, ensuring they are open all year.

**Allotments & Open Spaces**

The Allotments and Open Spaces Committee has a particularly wide remit. Councillor Paul English, once again elected as chair, ensured that the committee worked diligently at all times.

Binsted Ponds/area:

These ponds form part of a historical flood control measure for the area and come under Riparian Ownership laws. We have a contract in place to keep the hedge trimmed and late in 2022 we provided a Platinum Jubilee bench on the grass verge. This was one of the projects for 2022 associated with this historic year.

In addition to the Platinum Jubilee Bench plans are in place for the provision of up to 5 new specially designed benches around the parish commemorating the coronation of King Charles III.



**Open Spaces**

We continue to work closely with ADC and other agencies and interested parties regarding the upkeep of open spaces around Felpham.

The council has a responsibility to all residents of Felpham to manage those areas for which it has responsibility. This must be done fairly and for the benefit of the whole parish. Part of this responsibility is to ensure those areas are safe, well maintained and used for the purposes for which they are intended.

To help maintain, or carry out new works on some of our assets the council regularly uses the services of an organisation that supports young offenders, as well as professional companies, when the need arises.

The council has maintenance plans, or contracts, with a range of groups/companies to ensure this is done. This does incur cost and our tendering process for engaging professional services ensures that we get the most appropriate service at a price that reasonable and good value.

The area around the Aldingbourne Rife and to the North of Arun Leisure Centre continues to be something regularly discussed, and we liaise with others in their efforts in trying to maintain what are well used and established paths across much of this area.

Trees have been regularly discussed and to date this year 27 new trees have been planted, either as replacements for old, damaged, or dying trees, or at new locations. Some of these have been in partnership with local residents.

The large open spaces, (KGV, Longbrook, Old Rectory Gardens) are all monitored by this committee and reports are received from ADC officers regarding their ongoing maintenance. We have been assured that we will be involved in the development of ADC's next issue of the Management Plans for KGV and Longbrook.

The introduction of green, or pollinator, verges which encourage natural growth and habitat are regularly discussed.

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### **Projects and Resilience**

This committee, under the Chairmanship of Gloria Moss continues to deliver on the identified projects year on year.

It was great to see the 2022 Fun on the Prom take place following its forced absence due to COVID in previous years. Many people attended and commented that it was an enjoyable event with many new ideas. The firework display could not take place due to weather and tide conditions. This has resulted in us reviewing how we plan the event each year. With nature dictating to us the suitable date, we have no flexibility and run the risk of clashing with other events in the area. We must also consider the availability of entertainers and attractions and secure their attendance as early as possible. We also believe events such as Fun on the Prom have to evolve with new ideas to make them relevant to today's audience.

For 2023 we are introducing new concepts which we believe will make the event more up to date. This year a laser light show will be used for the first time. We recognise many will miss the fireworks, but given the limitations they place upon us, its vulnerability to the weather, consideration for local residents and their pets, and the impact on the environment we felt it was the right thing to do. 2023 promises to be bigger and better and the event is planned for Saturday August 12<sup>th</sup>.

The planning and running of this event takes a huge amount of time and effort I would like to express my thanks to those Councillors who help plan the event many months ahead as well as staffing the event and the many volunteers who helped make the day a success. Everyone gives their time freely and enthusiastically.

### Felpham Emergency Resilience Group (FERG)

Our formal response to COVID has now ended although the group still stands by to help those in need. We should not forget that there are some residents who, without the help of friends, neighbours, or the resilience group, would find life extremely challenging. We continue to collect and deliver medication to those most in need. Each time we responded we also fulfilled that need of vital human contact, which in turn allowed us to further provide additional and professional help as needed.

I have said it before and say it again; our volunteers have been brilliant, going out of their way to help others in need.

A summary of other projects either completed or still underway:

#### Outside barbecues.

Another Platinum Jubilee project, two new fixed barbecues, have been positioned on the edge of the putting green at Blakes Road. They will be available for use from early summer 2023.

#### Defibrillators.

In March 2023 we positioned a further defibrillator in Felpham, located within the Five Star Taxi office, and we have adopted the defibrillator located outside the Methodist Church in Felpham Way. This brings the number of defibrillators owned by the council in Felpham to five. We are now trying to identify a further location for our next defib.

These defibs are all maintained under a contract we have with the local community first responders.





First Aid training.

We have agreed to run, in conjunction with the Community First Responders, a series of free First Aid in the home awareness training sessions in 2023/24. These sessions will initially take place every two months with 14 residents gaining practical skills in first aid, CPR, and use of a defibrillator at each training session. Various organisations and groups will receive an invitation to nominate two people to attend.

As the scheme progresses, we hope to open the invitation wider.

Gateway signs

We continue to consider the provision of a new gateway sign on the promenade; situated at the parish boundary with Bognor Regis at the end of Longbrook Park. It would welcome people walking along the prom to Felpham.

Blue Plaque Trail

On March 8, 2023, at Felpham Sailing Club, the Platinum Jubilee Blue Plaque Trail was completed, with a plaque celebrating the life of Felpham resident Barbara Harmer, the first female commercial pilot of Concord, an intrepid skier and a highly accomplished sailor. Councillor Kevin Watson has, over the last few years researched and identified notable people from Felpham who are worthy of having a blue plaque. By adding our more recent plaques to several already in place there are now a total of 7 in the parish. They represent one for each decade of the Queen's reign and the Platinum Jubilee Trail is complete.

The parish council funded and supported this project, but all the credit must go to Councillor Kevin Watson whose determination and commitment to this project have been outstanding. There remains the possibility of further blue plaques if suitable individuals are identified.





## Potential future projects

Early 2023 also saw the committee consider how, following a request, we could help encourage and broaden people's knowledge of the shops and businesses in the village. There is limited signage, and the question has been asked if we are missing the opportunity to attract more visitors and encourage them to visit its shops, cafes, and businesses. This is something we will be considering into 2023.

ADC presented their initial plans for significant upgrades to the children's play area at KGV. As part of this project, the parish council has been asked to consider contributing to the project cost. We believe this is an excellent opportunity to breathe new life into this play area and look forward to engaging with ADC as the plans evolve.

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## **Summary**

This report is a snapshot of the council's extensive activity during the year and does not reflect the huge amount of work that goes on in the background, by the office team or by councillors themselves. Countless emails, letters and phone calls may be required to gather sufficient information to make what seems like a simple report or comment in the minutes of either Main Council or one of the Committees.

A Parish Councillor is a voluntary position, yet it demands a significant amount of time, effort, and commitment on the part of anyone fulfilling the role. It is more than simply attending meetings, it's about representing the best interests of the parish, and its people. It's about listening, engaging, debating and recognising that others may have a different view.

We operate in an environment where many of the things we would like to control or manage are simply beyond the authority of a Parish Council to influence and this is often a source of frustration. This does not mean we do not try and we will always strive to do our best and make our opinions count.

I would encourage members of the public to visit our website and view the minutes, so they gain a better picture of what it is we do. If more information is required, speaking to the Clerk may be helpful.

It was pleasing to welcome members of the public to some of our meetings and I hope they found the meetings informative.

2023 also brings us elections. Felpham has an allocation of 16 councillors, 8 in each ward. This year an election will take place in both wards as there are more nominations than positions. The council has had vacancies for some time, which it has regularly tried to fill, and this year not every current councillor has decided to stand for re-election. New faces will hopefully bring new ideas there will be a huge amount to learn. The knowledge and experience of those standing for re-election has been gained through hard work, dedication and commitment and should not be underestimated.

I sincerely hope, for the benefit of Felpham that this experience and knowledge is not lost.

### The last four years:

With the election looming, signifying the end of the current term of office I thought it would be an opportune moment to reflect on some of the activities and achievements of the council over the past four years.

#### Meetings;

Aside from our own meetings - well over 60 each year - which deal with the "normal" business, we also attend many meetings away from Felpham. We have nominated representatives attending meetings of the West Sussex Association of Local Councils (WSALC) and Arun District Association of Local Councils (ADALC) several times a year. These two organisations strongly support the function of Parish Councils and are a source of valuable information.

We also attend meetings and consultations about upcoming major developments or schemes either within Felpham, for example the Golf Course, or those that may have an impact on Felpham. For example, the major housing developments at Ford, including the proposed incinerator, the A27, A29 and the A259 road schemes, Rampion 2.

#### Budgets;

The past four years the council has exercised strict control over its budgets. We are one of the largest parishes in Arun yet have one of the lowest precepts. In real terms, when matched against inflation, this has resulted in a near 20% reduction in our precept. This represents great value and commitment by the council to deliver, at fair cost, our responsibilities to Felpham.

#### Grants;

Our grants process ensures that the council has supported numerous good causes, all of whom have directly supported hundreds of Felpham residents. These grants are crucial to the organisations which deliver relief and support to those who need it the most.

#### Transport;

We have, on behalf of residents, worked with WSCC in obtaining permission for several road traffic schemes. The proposed introduction of car parking fees at Links Ave and Grassmere car parks by ADC was vigorously objected to, and a strong case was made to successfully reject this proposal. FPC currently contribute to the costs of these car parks, allowing them to be free to all users.

#### Children/Youth clubs;

Since taking over the ownership of Felpham Community Hall in 2018 it has been extensively used by children's groups of all ages. This has expanded in the last year by the introduction, in partnership with Sussex Clubs for Young People and Worthing Homes, of a Friday afternoon youth club and this continues to show great promise.

We have also committed to a significant financial contribution to the upgrade of play equipment at King George V's field play area. This work will hopefully start this year.

COVID;

Felpham Emergency Resilience Group responded to the pandemic in an incredible fashion. Our volunteers, over almost three years, regularly and selflessly stood up and helped hundreds of residents when they needed support. For those who were especially vulnerable, ill or at high risk collecting and delivering their medication or shopping was literally a life saving role. We delivered over **10,000** prescriptions, fetched, and delivered shopping, transported people to and from doctors, hospitals and dentists. Working with the WSCC Hub and other agencies we played a major role and received high praise for all of our efforts. I am immensely proud, along with Councillor Gloria Moss to have led this response.

We work closely with WSCC and neighbouring parishes as they consider setting up their own resilience teams.

Looking Forward

Post May promises to be challenging and I hope, whatever the outcome, that all councillors fully commit to supporting the work of the council, supporting our residents, the various projects, Fun on the Prom, Felpham Emergency Resilience Group, and the Youth Group to name but a few and hopefully bring some new, fresh ideas for the future.

As with any council there is a high degree of regulation. Standards, policies and procedures are there to give guidance on how a Parish Council and its councillors must operate. It gives guidance on what its powers are, and what a council and its councillors can and cannot do. I am sure this may be daunting to many but with time and patience, I hope everyone will make a positive contribution.

Good luck to all.

Dave Smart  
Chairman Felpham Parish Council  
13 April 2023