

Fontmell Magna Parish Council

Annual Report for 2021/22

1. Introduction

This annual report summarises the activities of the Parish Council (PC) over the past year ending 31st March 2022. As before the year has been dominated by the impact of and responses to the Coronavirus pandemic. A major decision affecting the parish has been the granting of planning permission in January 2022 to build 30 new homes on land near Home Farm on South Street.



2. Governance

With the easing of Covid restrictions in England and the recruitment of new councillors, the frequency of Parish Council meetings was restored to six in a year – May, July, September, November, January, March. The minutes of meetings and all significant associated documents are available on the Parish website <http://www.fontmellmagnapc.co.uk>.

The PC started the year with 5 councillors with Mike Humphreys as Chair and Jeremy Long as Vice-Chair. A new Clerk/RFO had been recruited, Sam Smith, following the departure of Marianne Wheatley; she has done a great job in supporting the Council.

From March 2021 the council had a complement of only 4 councillors with Mike Humphreys as Chair and Jeremy Long as Vice-Chair, with Marianne Wheatley continuing as Clerk/RFO. Two new councillors with co-opted in September, Laura Kurton from Bedchester and Andrew Davis from Fontmell village.

For a short period the council had a full complement of 7 councillors, that was until November when Jeremy Long stepped down and then in December Annie Newbury stepped down; we were sorry to see them both depart. Andrew Davis was elected Vice-Chair in November 2021.

All councillors were required to complete an online Register of Interests, to replace the paper version. The register is available to public on Dorset Council's website A-Z of Town & Parish Councils. https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/your-council/parish-and-town-councils/parishatoz/-/ddl_display/ddl/424859/274688/maximized

For the majority of the year the responsibilities of councillors were:

	Area	Responsibilities	Who
1.	Planning	Planning applications, neighbourhood plan, NP Monitoring Group, planning regulations.	Mike
2.	Highways	Road maintenance, signage and potholes, traffic management, speed watch, strategic planning, A350CG.	Jeremy/ Andrew
3.	Environmental Protection	Flood protection, snow clearance, verges, litter and fly tipping, grass cutting, grounds and hedgerow maintenance, dog fouling, applications for tree work and encouraging tree planting, Best Kept Village.	Annie/ Vacancy
4.	District Liaison	Ward Councillor, police, health & medical services (eg. Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Shaftesbury Hospital), DAPTC, Dorset Unitary Council, Climate & Ecological Support Group, neighbouring parish councils, Compton Abbas airfield.	Vacancy

5.	Parish Communications	Parish website (including posting of The Gossip Tree), email group, social media, village shop liaison, parish notice boards, Annual Parish Report.	Laura
6.	Social Infrastructure	Maintenance of parish council assets, Home Watch, defibrillators, village shop, broadband and mobile coverage, recreation, allotments, Village Hall.	Christine
7.	Footpaths	Footpaths, rights of way, signposts.	Andy
8.	Governance	Procedures, standing orders, regulations, new councillor recruitment and induction, councillor training, committees, risk management, contingency planning.	Mike

As in previous years several attempts were made to recruit more councillors to replace Jeremy and Annie but with no success. There remain two vacancies which need to be filled by new volunteers, to lead on Environment Protection and on District Liaison. Without new people the PC will struggle to devote any meaningful time to these important areas of work, particularly to Climate Change and Ecological Emergency initiatives.

Mike is standing down as chair in May after three years in post but will continue to serve as a councillor up until May 2023, completing 8 years as a councillor. A new chair needs to be appointed at the next AGM in May 2022.

The PC has been strongly supported by our Dorset Councillor Jane Somper. Jane has provided frequent updates throughout the year on all the relevant initiatives and campaigns running in Dorset and has attended most parish council meetings. She has vigorously championed the various issues raised by the Parish Council with officers at Dorset Council on road safety, flooding and many other matters. We are very grateful for her continuing support.

3. Finance

The financial year runs from April 2021-March 2022. The PC started the financial year with a balance of £7,073 and closed the year with a balance of £9,132.

Expenditure during the year totalled £7,553, excluding VAT, which was well below the budget of £9,915, primarily due to postponing the Neighbourhood Plan update. Staff costs account for 43% of the budget; a summary of spending versus budget for the year is shown in Appendix 1.

Sources of income through the year were:

Parish precept	£9,750
Interest & VAT refund	£140

The principal items of expenditure were:

Clerk's salary	£4,328
Insurance	£611
DAPTC subs	£259
Website upgrade	£485
Grants	£935

Grants were made to the Church (£400) for grounds maintenance, to the Village Hall (£485) for insurance and maintenance of the playground, and to the FM Public Amenity Trust (£50).

Full details of income and expenditure through the year can be found on the Parish website.

http://www.fontmellmagnapc.co.uk/Finance_29458.aspx

The Parish precept for 2022/23 is set at £10,769. Precepts in previous years have been:

2021/22	£9,750
2020/21	£9,000
2019/20	£8,500
2018/19	£7,000
2017/18	£7,000

The PC will continue to carefully manage expenditure and to maintain a reserve approximately equivalent to one year's precept.

4. Planning and the Neighbourhood Plan

4a. Spring Meadows Development

The most significant development in planning terms for the parish was the granting of planning permission to Pennyfarthing Homes in January 2022, to build 30 new homes on land near Home Farm along South Street, at the southern entrance to the village. This site was allocated for new housing in the Neighbourhood Plan and provides the best solution for Fontmell to meet its allocation for new housing under the North Dorset Local Plan.

Construction work got underway promptly at the end of February and is expected to be completed in the Spring 2023. The development, called Spring Meadows, is a mix of 2, 3 and 4 bed houses which includes 12 affordable homes, and a drop-off area for parents bringing their children to St. Andrew's School. This latter facility will hopefully reduce some of the traffic congestion in West Street around school drop-off and pick-up times: the Parish Council is in discussion with St Andrew's School about adopting the school drop-off zone and becoming responsible for its maintenance. Residents were surveyed to suggest names for the two roads on the development; Sutton View and Old Crown Road were finally chosen by Dorset Council; the road layout is shown in Appendix 2. Whilst it's inevitable there will be some minor disruption as the building work is carried out, so far the developers have responded quickly to issues raised by residents.



Once completed the development will bring substantial benefits to the Fontmell community. New houses will mean new families making their homes in Fontmell, with local children to bolster the numbers attending the school, more business for the village shop and pub, perhaps more people contributing to community activities. Also, a condition of the planning permission requires the landowner to make significant financial contributions to the village community. These include £128,000 for improvements to the Village Hall facilities, indoor and outdoor sports areas, and the childrens' playground in West Street.

A dedicated page has been set up on the parish website to provide information about Spring Meadows, including details of the financial contributions to the parish which will benefit all residents. It is planned to include monthly updates on progress which will also appear in the Gossip Tree. For the latest information go to:

http://www.fontmellmagnapc.co.uk/Spring_Meadows_Development_41017.aspx

4b. Planning Applications

Fontmell Magna, in common with other villages in Dorset, has a Neighbourhood Plan, which was made in November 2018. Since then, 43 new dwellings have been granted planning permission in the parish, which matches the allocation for new housing in the Local Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan is an important document, affording some protection against unwanted or inappropriate development in the village or wider parish. Its policies have been cited on several occasions as the basis for objecting to planning applications, eg.

- 29 new homes on land along Mill Street.
- agricultural workers cottage at Penn Hill.
- erection of four shepherds huts at Home Mead Cottage, North Street.

Each new planning application that arrives is assessed by members of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group to gauge its compliance with NP policies. The NPMG publishes a report with a recommendation for the parish council to support or object to the application. Details of all planning applications and associated NPMG reports are available on the parish website.

http://www.fontmellmagnapc.co.uk/Neighbourhood_Plan_Monitoring_Group_34858.aspx

The Parish Council is very grateful to the NPMG members for their assistance in assessing the planning applications; these are:

Roy King (Chair)	Robert McCurrach	Dick Stainer	Barry Roberts
John Knight	Mike Humphreys	Michael Hobbs	Andrew Davis

Fortunately the Parish Council has been able to support the vast majority of planning applications received. In the year 2021/22, 28 new applications arrived and objections were made against just two:



- Grove Farm, Hannah's Hill, Hartgrove – listed building extension, inappropriate design and materials (subsequently amended and now supported by the PC).
- Gupples Farm, Gupples Lane, Hartgrove – large barn causing harm to setting of listed building.

4c. Neighbourhood Plan

A new Local Plan is being drafted by Dorset Council due to be published in May 2022. This new plan is likely to include a larger allocation of new housing to be built in Fontmell Magna,

possibly 60 houses. To address this will require an update to the Neighbourhood Plan, to understand housing needs and to identify new development sites that will have majority support amongst residents. It will also provide an opportunity to update some other policies, such as road safety and our response to the climate change emergency. A working party will be needed to tackle this important work and a call for volunteers will go out in due course. Hopefully some residents will come forward to contribute to this work, with a desire to conserve the character of the village and wider parish and to achieve a vibrant and thriving community.

A second site for new development in Fontmell Magna, Blandfords Farm Barn (site 22), attracted some interest in July 2021. A meeting was held with a potential developer, who wanted to understand the PC's wishes for development of the site. It was emphasised that a small development was preferred, of some 10 houses, that included some affordable homes.

There's no doubt the Neighbourhood Plan has worked well for the community so far, bringing protection against inappropriate development, but it needs to be kept up to date if it's to retain a strong influence over future planning decision.

5. Highways & Road Safety

The Parish Council pursued a range of issues and initiatives through the year to improve the condition of the roads and lanes, and to improve road safety.

The PC has supported a Dorset Highways scheme to improve the junction layout at Gore Clump. This follows a fatal accident in 2017. The scheme will widen the visibility when exiting Boundary Road on to the C13, see diagram in Appendix 3.

Sections of West Street and Church Street were resurfaced in June; a new traffic island has been installed at the entrance to Woodbridge Lane in Bedchester. The PC has lobbied Highways to improve the road surface along Parsonage Street and Gupples Lane in Hartgrove.

Trees along Mill Street caused problems in July and September with overhanging branches creating a hazard, which was reported to Highways to resolve.

Dorset Highways have rejected a second request to set a 30mph limit through the crossroads at Bedchester, as it does not meet the criteria set for this measure. On the east side of the parish, the entrance to the DWT car park at the top of Fontmell Hill continues to cause problems to users; a further request has been made to Gore Farm to increase the gap between the two concrete blocks.

A vigorous Road Safety campaign has been mounted by Andrew, for the PC, and Peter Mole to improve road safety along the A350 as it winds through the village, along Lurmer Street and south-bound and north-bound exits. The S-bends and blind spots along this stretch are a continuing source of danger to pedestrians, cyclists and car users alike; some collisions have occurred and near misses of pedestrians reported. Several discussions have taken place with Dorset Highways and more recently with the Road Safety Manager to agree a way forward.

The first step will be to install a Speed Indicator Device (SID). Recent traffic surveys, at the north and south villages entrances, at Lurmer Street and along West Street, have provided the evidence needed to justify the investment of some £3000. The SID displays the actual speed of a vehicle and flashes a warning message if above the speed limit. It will be mounted at either end of the village at alternate 6-8 week intervals.

The next step will be to secure a 20mph advisory sign before the Parsonage Street/Knapp S-bend. So far Highways are proving reluctant to agree to this but the campaign will continue. Beyond that the PC will be looking to secure a 20mph limit along some of the village's minor roads such as West Street provided there is support for this amongst residents. Ultimately it may be possible to achieve a 20mph speed limit along the A350 through the village centre which is seen as the best long-term solution.

Andrew is discussing separately with Highways introducing a marked pedestrian way along West Street, from the footpath next to "Timbers" to the Village Hall.

Dorset Highways appear reluctant to agree these reasonable measures to mitigate the risks posed by speeding traffic but our campaign will continue.



6. Climate & Environment

The parish's footpaths were generally in good order through the year. The PC requested that the landowner of the permissive path alongside Marshmoor Lodge to allow access to residents; this is a popular walk to Sutton Waldron. A new footpath was opened linking Compton Abbas with Fontmell Down and Fontmell Village. The PC responded to the Dorset Rights of Way Consultation in September 2021.

A dog waste bin has been purchased to be installed near top of Fontmell Hill, at entrance to Gallops Walk. The PC will pay for installation and emptying every 8 weeks initially.

We are most grateful to John Ryall for maintaining the grass area and bench in Church Street for many years. John Berry has come forward to continue the work. Another resident, John Gilbert, has offered to control the weeds in the brook.

With the Covid restrictions it has not been possible to organise parish litter picks, and with Annie's departure there is no councillor available to organise these at present. Hopefully a new person will come forward to take the lead.

The defibrillator located in the School carpark has been regularly inspected and maintained through the year to ensure it stays in full working order; thanks to Annie and latterly Christine for doing this. So far it has not been used in an emergency.

One area of disappointment has been the lack of engagement with the Climate & Ecological Emergency campaigns and projects running in Dorset, to understand and promote the actions that could be taken by Fontmell residents in response to climate change. For example, an Electric Vehicle Charging Point could be installed in the village, for owners to charge their vehicles. Regrettably there is no councillor available to lead in this area.

7. Communications

Laura Kurton joined the parish council in September and has made real impact in improving the council's communications with residents. A Facebook page and group has been set up to disseminate Fontmell Community News, the News Items page on the PC website has been overhauled and regular posts are appearing on Next Door and distributed by email.

All parish residents are being consulted through a door-to-door initiative and online survey to understand their preferences for obtaining news and information, so that relevant items can be distributed in the most appropriate way. Also residents views will be sought on current issues such as road safety, investing the Spring Meadows financial contributions, and volunteering.

The Parish Council website is working well following the upgrade, so the content conforms to accessibility regulations and is readily available on mobile devices. Hopefully residents find it a useful source of information, covering planning applications, news items, community information and much more.

PC councillors have continued to write articles for the Councillor's Chronicles blog published in the Gossip Tree. The idea is to make the PC's activities and its councillors more visible and hopefully encourage new people to come forward to join the council.

St. Andrew's School has been invited to raise a project to design a logo for the parish council to use in its communications. We look forward to seeing the results of the childrens' ideas.

8. Parish Projects

The PC has continued to support the Fontmell Magna Community Land Trust and is delighted to learn that the fundraising target of £400,000 has been reached, including a contribution from Pennyfarthing Homes the developers of Spring Meadows. It is understood acquiring the freehold for the shop will include the BT telephone box outside.

A resident raised the issue of the poor mobile network coverage in the village. This could become more problematic as BT phase out analogue services, when in the event of a power cut a mobile network would be needed to call emergency services from home. The PC is making enquiries with mobile network operators to see if the scope for improving 3G and 4G coverage in the village.

9. Plans for 2022/23

The PC will seek to achieve a range of improvements and targets in the coming year, including:

- Campaigning to improve road safety, along the A350 through Fontmell and along parish lanes.
- Re-organising parish council communications in line with residents' wishes.
- Supporting the Queen's Platinum Jubilee street party on 5th June.
- Promoting environmental "green" policies that help to provide and maintain habitat and food sources for local wildlife.
- Supporting Dorset County initiatives in tackling the Climate Change emergency.
- Arranging community litter picks.
- Promoting the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the village.
- Installing a Speed Indicator Device to reduce speed on the A350 at village entrances.
- Continuing to campaign for a 20mph speed limit on Village roads and lanes.
- Commenting on Dorset Council's draft Local Plan 2021-37 expected in May 2022.
- Updating the Neighbourhood Plan, to reflect the changes in Dorset's Local Plan that affect Fontmell Magna and ensure the Plan and its policies continue to carry weight in decisions on future planning applications.
- Continuing to ensure planning applications are in line with FMNP policies.
- Liaising with Pennyfarthing Homes regarding the Spring Meadows development to resolve any issues arising.
- Maintaining the War Memorial and other village facilities owned by the PC.

This is a challenging list and needs volunteers to contribute their time, both existing councillors and new people as councillors or partners. The Parish Council continues to carry vacancies, two at the present time. **A parish with the population and amenities of Fontmell Magna should have a fully constituted parish council**, to shape, protect and preserve the village and its surroundings which we all value and enjoy, but this won't happen without some effort. It would be enormously helpful if some new people come forward to fill the 2 councillor vacancies. Serving on the Parish Council is an enjoyable and rewarding way of contributing to our community.

And finally – the PC wishes to thank The Gossip Tree editor and committee for their support, and Cllr. Somper for her support and regular updates. Also, thanks go to the Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group who continue to provide advice on new planning applications. And special thanks to all who have given their time voluntarily to serve as parish councillors during the year, and also to the Clerk, for her work in supporting the parish.

MH/FMPC/April 2022

Appendix 1: Income & Expenditure for the year April 2021-March 2022

(Un-audited)

Period	Staff wages	Bookkeeper	Website & IT	Travel Expenses /Stationary	Maintenance & grass cutting	Insurance	Training	DAPTC/SLCC	Planning	Miscellaneous	Neighbour-hood plan	Grants	TOTAL
Budget	4,460.00	95.00	150.00	400.00	390.00	620.00	250.00	350.00	500.00	500.00	1,200.00	1,000.00	9,915.00
Apr			130.00		25.00								
May	711.60			69.51		611.08		259.14				485.00	
Jun	361.60			28.00	50.00								
1st Qtr	1,073.20	0.00	130.00	97.51	75.00	611.08	0.00	259.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	485.00	2,730.93
Jul	361.60			19.00	50.00								
Aug	361.60	44.50		10.00	0.00								
Sep	361.60			33.22	50.00		30.00						
2nd Qtr	1,084.80	44.50	0.00	62.22	100.00	0.00	30.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,321.52
Half Year Total	2,158.00	44.50	130.00	159.73	175.00	611.08	30.00	259.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	485.00	4,052.45
Oct			485.00		25.00							400.00	
Nov	723.20	50.50		53.30	25.00								
Dec	361.60												
3rd Qtr	1,084.80	50.50	485.00	53.30	50.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	400.00	2,123.60
Jan	361.60			82.13			30.00						
Feb	361.60												
Mar	361.60			84.78			45.00					50.00	
4th Qtr	1,084.80	0.00	0.00	166.91	0.00	0.00	75.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	50.00	1,376.71
Spend 31/03/22	4,327.60	95.00	615.00	379.94	225.00	611.08	105.00	259.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	935.00	7,552.76
Balance	132.40	0.00	(465.00)	20.06	165.00	8.92	145.00	90.86	500.00	500.00	1,200.00	65.00	2,362.24
			website upgrade included in 2020/21 budget- invoiced late	inc £15.30 per meeting mileage (Clerk) and room hire			2 x new Cllrs	Did not renew SLCC					£9,750 precept requested in Jan 2021

FONTMELL MAGNA PARISH COUNCIL 2021

Budget v Spend 2021-2022 ex-VAT

Appendix 2: Spring Meadows development road names and numbering



Appendix 3: Junction Improvement at Gore Clump

