

Fontmell Magna Parish Council

Annual Report for 2020/21

1. Introduction

This annual report summarises the activities of the Parish Council (PC) over the past year ending 31st March 2021. Whilst much of the PC's attention during the year was focussed on housing development and planning applications, the year has been dominated by the impact of and responses to the Coronavirus pandemic.



2. Governance

Parish Council meetings during the year were reduced to four and had to be conducted using the Zoom videoconferencing facility. The AGM and Annual Parish Meeting were delayed until June, and subsequent PC meetings held in September, December and March. The minutes of meetings and all significant associated documents are available on the Parish website

<http://www.fontmellmagnapc.co.uk>.

From March 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. 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
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/Andy
4.	District Liaison	Police, health & medical services (e.g. Patient Partnership Group, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Shaftesbury Hospital), DAPTC, Dorset Unitary Council, neighbouring parish councils, Compton Abbas airfield.	Mike
5.	Parish Communications	Parish website (including posting of The Gossip Tree), email group, social media, village shop liaison, parish notice boards, Annual Parish Report.	Mike/Andy
6.	Social Infrastructure	Maintenance of parish council assets, Home Watch, defibrillators, village shop, broadband and mobile coverage, recreation, allotments, Village Hall.	Annie
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

Attempts to recruit more councillors continued throughout the year with little success. However in February 2021 Christine Scott came forward and was co-opted to the Council in March 2021, taking responsibility for Social Infrastructure.

There remain two vacancies which need to be filled by other enthusiastic volunteers coming forward to join our lively, diligent and cohesive Council so that we can be fully responsive to residents' concerns and needs. The Council is aware and concerned that there is an obvious lack of diversity in its groups. It welcomes expressions of interest from people who could bring a wider perspective to its discussions, particularly from young people, women and people with disability and from nationally under-represented ethnic backgrounds.

Fontmell has been strongly supported by Dorset Councillor Jane Somper. She has attended all PC meetings to report on County activities and has been pro-active in pursuing a number of issues raised by councillors and residents. Jane has provided frequent updates throughout the year on the various sources of support to residents during the Covid crisis.

In September 2020 the PC's policies and procedures were reviewed and updated; these are available on the PC website now.

In September Marianne Wheatley formally advised of her intention to stand down as Clerk/RFO and the Council expressed their sincere thanks for her 8 years of service to the Council. Interviews for a replacement Clerk were held in November and Samantha Smith was appointed from 1st February 2021. A handover of responsibilities took place in February 2021.

3. Finance

The financial year runs from April 2020-March 2021. The PC started the financial year with a balance of £7,702 and closed the year with a balance of £7,073.

Expenditure during the year totalled £9,388, excluding VAT, which was very close to the budget of £9,471. There was excess spend on staff costs attributable to the change of Clerk, with two salary payments in February to cover handover and purchasing a laptop for the Clerk's use. The budgeted final payment of £485 for the upgraded website was delayed so will appear in the 2021/22 figures.

Sources of income through the year were:

Parish precept	£9,000
Interest & VAT refund	£209

The principal items of expenditure were:

Clerk's salary	£4,849
Clerk's laptop and software	£423
Insurance	£595
Lurmer Street hedgerow	£795
DAPTC/SLCC subs	£312
Planning Consultant	£434
Grants	£877

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 2021/22 was set at £9,750. Precepts in previous years have been:

2020/21	£9,000
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2019/20	£8,500
2018/19	£7,000
2017/18	£7,000
2016/17	£2,050

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

The PC is consulted on all planning applications in the parish and assesses each one for their potential impact on the parish and benefits to the parish community. Since its adoption in November 2018 the Fontmell Magna Neighbourhood Plan has been actively used to assess planning applications as they have come forward to ensure compliance with the FMNP's policies. This work has been undertaken largely by the NP Monitoring Group comprising:

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

Through 2020/21 the PC has considered 28 planning applications, assisted greatly by the Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group which has reported on their compliance with NP policies; all the NPMG's reports are published on the PC website. There is also a summary report covering the whole year 2020/21 showing all the planning applications received by the PC and its responses.

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

The PC expresses its sincere thanks to the NPMG for their diligent work in monitoring the Neighbourhood Plan and advising the Parish Council.

The PC supported most of the planning applications, raising objections against four:

2/2020/0641	Gupples Farm, Hartgrove
P/HOU/2020/00139	54 West Street
P/VOC/2020/00229	Springhead
P/FUL/2020/00314	Home Mead Cottage, 8 North Street

The approved developments will add 4 dwellings to the parish's housing stock.

The major development on the south side of the village, Land at Home Farm South Street, has still not progressed beyond the planning application stage. A full planning application was submitted in April 2020 to which the Parish Council raised a formal objection on a number of aspects of the scheme including the design and layout of the houses and landscaping; the full objection document is available via the parish website. The developers Pennyfarthing Homes subsequently made adjustments to the scheme to meet the PC's objections; their discussions continue with Dorset Council on several outstanding issues involving ecology and infrastructure contributions. The updated proposed development layout is shown in Appendix 1.

An update of the Neighbourhood Plan has been postponed, pending Government plans to revise the national planning system and also Dorset Council's update to the Local Plan. The Parish Council responded to the Government's consultation on its plans in October 2020 and also to Dorset Council's Local Plan consultation in January 2021.

5. Highways

The Parish Council pursued a range of issues through the year raised by residents affecting highways and roads.

An increasing number of large HGVs are using the A350 route through the village centre. The PC has made several representations to Dorset Highways to find ways of enforcing the voluntary one-way scheme for HGVs of using the A350 when travelling north to Shaftesbury and the C13 when travelling south from Shaftesbury. Motorbikes speeding through the village also raised concerns over noise and safety.



The PC made representations to Dorset Highways over installing speed restrictions along two sections of road: at Bedchester crossroads, and along the B3091 at Lower Hartgrove, but neither fall within the criteria stated in the Dorset Council policy for speed restrictions. A suggestion to install a Variable Speed Indicator device at the village's south entrance on the A350 to slow traffic was assessed but the cost proved prohibitive.

Dorset Highways carried out some remedial work on drainage outside Pipers Mill to alleviate the seasonal flooding by the bridge. The long-term solution of installing larger capacity drains has yet to be scheduled by Highways.



On the east side of the parish, the entrance to the DWT car park at the top of Fontmell Hill is now substantially narrowed by two concrete blocks, installed by the landowner to prevent flytipping. Several residents have reported finding these difficult to negotiate; other motorists are parking on the nearby verges.

Dorset Highways are pursuing a scheme to improve the junction at Gore Clump along the C13, following a fatal accident; a diagram of the proposed scheme is shown in Appendix 2. This work will be carried out in 2021 along with improvements to the C13 at Dinah's Hollow.

The Parish Council was obliged to meet the cost of cutting back a section of long hedge along Lurmer Street which was inhibiting the views of traffic for drivers and pedestrians, as Dorset Highways would not accept responsibility. The vegetation included several dead trees which had to be felled; new saplings were planted as replacements.

Several requests were made to Dorset Highways to re-surface Gupples Lane in Hartgrove but this remains outstanding.

6. Climate & Environment

Dorset Council has declared a Climate & Ecological Emergency. The PC responded to the Council's consultation in November on its Climate & Ecological Emergency strategy and action plan and encouraged residents to respond individually. Parish Councillors have attended the Peoples' Assembly run by the Dorset C&EE support group.

Parish litter picks planned in October and February had to be cancelled due to Covid lockdown restrictions. Through the Gossip Tree, residents were asked to keep the length of road verge adjoining their property free of litter to try to keep parish roads tidy. Posters and the Gossip Tree was also used to request that residents to "cut less, cut later" of their verges through the Spring and Summer to allow wildlife and plants to flourish in this habitat.

The lime tree at Bedchester crossroads was pruned and repair work undertaken to the adjacent verge to stop further erosion. Work was undertaken to clear moss on the pavement in Orchard Close which had become very slippery.

The defibrillator located in the School carpark has been regularly inspected and maintained through the year to ensure it stays in full working order. Thankfully it has not been needed in an emergency.

The parish's footpaths were generally in good order through the year. Dog fouling continued to be a problem along some lanes and footpaths; posters and labels were placed at many locations to remind dog walkers to clean up after their pet. The Middle Mill ponds in Mill Street had become clogged with Starwort over the summer. The ponds were subsequently cleared, partly by Dorset Wildlife Trust but mainly through the voluntary initiative of a resident, Gary Payne – a big thank you to Gary.

A footpath running from West Street to Sutton Waldron had been blocked by new gates erected by the landowner. Dorset Council Rangers were contacted to intervene and re-open this popular route.

7. Parish Projects

The Parish Council's new website came online in December enabling access across multiple devices (laptop, tablet, phones) to bring it into line with the prevailing accessibility regulations. The Clerk and Chair received training on how to maintain the site; the total cost of the upgrade was around £1000.

Publicity was given to the government's Gigabit Voucher Scheme, designed to enable residents to acquire fibre connection to their homes with very high-speed internet connection at a subsidised cost. There was limited interest from residents.

The PC attempted to purchase the BT telephone box outside the Village Shop, but the landowner decided to buy it. Its future use is not clear.

In a desire to make the PC's activities and its councillors more visible, a new blog was launched called Councillor's Chronicles. It is published monthly on the website and in the Gossip Tree. The aim is to talk about some of the activities of councillors in a light-hearted style, which may encourage new people to come forward to join the council.

8. Plans for 2021/22

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

- 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.
- Re-establishing physical Parish Council meetings.
- Commenting on Dorset Council's draft Local Plan 2021-37 expected in the summer or autumn.
- 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 proposed development in South Street (see Appendix 1).
- Maintaining the War Memorial and other village facilities owned by the PC.

It would be enormously helpful if some new people came forward to fill the remaining 2 councillor vacancies. **A parish with the importance, history 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. 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/May 2021

Appendix 1: Proposed development on Land South of Home Farm, South Street



Appendix 2: Junction Improvement at Gore Clump

