

# ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2024 - REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, FAWKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Fawkham Parish Council (FPC) has five voluntary Councillors: Laura Evans (Chair), James Cherry (Vice Chair), Will Johnstone, David Mansfield and Lucie Sleeman. David and Lucie joined or rejoined us during the last year. We are one of the smallest Parish Councils in Kent. Our clerk is Grace Champion, who joined us in September 2021 and is employed for eight hours a week. We all aim to work hard for the benefit of our community.

Parish Council meetings are held at least monthly, and members of the public are always welcome to attend. Meeting dates are given on the PC's website, along with the agenda and minutes of each meeting: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/home-1/meetings-minutes-agendas/>.

An overview of your Parish Council's activity over the last 12 months is given below:

- **Neighbourhood Plan:** FPC resolved in December 2020 to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. This gives a community a legal say in local planning matters, and can be a powerful tool to guide future development. Last year:

- Exhibitions describing the content of the draft Plan were held in the village hall over the summer, following delivery of a third Neighbourhood Plan leaflet to all houses to publicise them. Alongside the exhibitions was a questionnaire seeking feedback on the draft Plan. This was completed by 68 residents which will greatly help us ensure the Plan reflects what people in Fawkham think is important and needed. Several bodies such as Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Natural England were also consulted. The comments received have been carefully considered and, where appropriate, changes made to the Neighbourhood Plan in light of them. A final draft version is due to be signed off by FPC in the spring of 2024, and then submitted to SDC for the examination process later in 2024. Thanks go to the Steering Group for their ongoing work.

Please visit: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/neighbourhood-plan/> for more information, to get more involved and to keep up to date with progress.

- **Local Plan:** FPC responded to SDC's second Regulation 18 consultation on the new draft Local Plan, *Plan 2040*. The Plan contains proposed development sites along with policies which will guide what can be built and where, and what should be protected, until 2040. A number of sites are proposed for development, including some in the Green Belt, and we were very pleased that no sites are proposed within our Parish.
- **Planning:** the PC is consulted by SDC and comments on every planning application in the Parish, although our view is only advisory. Like all rural communities in the Green Belt, the challenge is to get the balance right between supporting owners to make reasonable adaptations, extensions and improvements, but standing firm against inappropriate development that causes harm to the Green Belt or threatens the character of the Parish. Around 25 applications were considered and commented on by the Parish Council, plus a number of planning conditions were also commented upon. The larger developments were:
  - Salts Farm depot: the detailed planning application for 26 dwellings was reviewed and commented on. This included housing types, layout, design and landscaping. Construction is now underway.
  - Chimmens Solar Farm at Speedgate: a 99 hectare (245 acre) site on agricultural land which will generate 49.9MW of electricity. FPC objected to this development and SDC's decision is awaited.
  - Gay Dawn Farm (Corinthian Sports Club): conversion of barns into 9 houses. Two PC members and a District Councillor presented the Parish's objection to SDC's Development Control Committee, however, SDC granted planning permission, subject to certain conditions.

- Orchard Farm: SDC granted planning permission for 8 bungalows, adjacent to the railway bridge - in Horton Kirby & South Darenth Parish although the only access is from Fawkham. We were pleased to note that the proposal to make the road under the railway bridge a single track was dropped. Many residents had objected to the proposed give way arrangements, as did FPC, in which we were supported by District Cllr Malone.
- The PC raised various concerns with Planning Enforcement during the year which SDC are/ have investigated, with further action expected to be taken where required.
- The **King's Coronation** was celebrated with a family event at Small Grains on May 6th. The ceremony was shown on a large screen; cakes and picnics were enjoyed; children dressed as royalty, had their faces painted, made paper crowns and received a commemorative coin; and the Local Vocals choir entertained us. We hope the red, white and blue seeds will flower this year. Thank you to all the volunteers to helped make this event a success.
- **Small Grains** amenity green space, which is owned by SDC: FPC's contractor began to make additional grass cuts, meaning the area is able to be better used. Issues with some houses have been raised with West Kent Housing Association. We continue to seek a solution to the parking issues. As the road does not extend to the front of all 10 houses, numbers 1-3 are required to drive across part of the amenity green space to park. This has created deep ruts to the surface and an unsightly appearance to that part of the open space. An informal parking area has been created for numbers 8 -10, although this needs improvement. The draft Neighbourhood Plan includes a proposal for the provision of two parking areas with 17 parking spaces, segregated from the remaining amenity open space by wooden barriers to protect the rest of the amenity green space. This proposal will be pursued with SDC.
- **Road issues:** concerns over Fawkham's lanes featured prominently in the Parish Survey of 2019 as things residents don't like about living here. As a result, we devote a lot of our time to helping address these issues:
  - We submitted a **Highways Improvement Plan (HIP)** to Kent County Council's Highways team in February. Shown below are brief details of the 6 issues we highlighted:
    - o The safety of the walkway to the school from Michaels Lane
    - o Parking at Small Grains
    - o Undulating eastern carriageway edge to Valley Road south of Court Lodge, north of Ridgeway
    - o Lack of sufficient sight line at the bottom of Speedgate Hill as you turn onto Valley Road
    - o Lack of sufficient warning of the school
    - o Difficulties exiting Small Grains.

We will keep you informed of KCC's response to these issues.

- Residents are reminded of the importance of **reporting all accidents** to the Police, especially if they involve any personal injury. It is these crash data statistics that are used to direct KCC's available funds to the areas that need it the most.
- We continue to make good use of KCC's online reporting tool to get repairs done, including lots of **pothole repairs**. Details of how to use this reporting tool can be found on our website: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/directory/name/road-issues-how-to-report-a-problem/>.
- We continue to request **litter picks** of the Valley Road from Sevenoaks District Council every 6-7 months.
- **Defibrillators:** there are now four defibrillators in Fawkham. All are accessible 24 hours a day with full instructions provided with the machines. You can find them outside: the village hall, the Rising Sun, Corinthian Sports Club and Speedgate Saddlery. FPC hosted CPR/defibrillator training session at the village hall in April which was well-attended.

- **Fawkham's Remembrance Service:** a wreath was laid and a donation made to the British Legion on behalf of the Parish, and the war memorial was again decorated with knitted and crocheted poppies. We would like to thank Peter Cronk who has continued to provide and look after the planting around the war memorial, which is very much appreciated.
- **Christmas tree lights switch on:** chocolate packs were handed out to children and a similar number donated to the Community Cupboard food bank. The Rising Sun Inn again kindly provided mulled wine and mince pies afterwards. **Easter chocolates** for children were also left by the Easter bunny on both village greens. We would also like to thank Christine Cronk for her fabulous postbox toppers which have brought a smile!
- **Lorry Watch:** residents are needed to enable Lorry Watch sessions to be restarted, though please continue to report to us any inappropriate use of Valley Road, which has a 7.5T except for access restriction. If you are interested in helping, please contact us. <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/lorry-watch/>
- **Parish Assets:** Parish Councillors sanded and restrained the benches on the village green and both noticeboards before the winter weather set in. All assets owned by FPC are inspected each year and any maintenance required is carried out.
- **Public Rights of Way:** Parish Councillors walk all the public footpaths in the parish at least once a year to check for any problems such as missing signs, broken stiles or blockages. Please let us know of any issues and we will do our best to get them sorted. The public footpaths can be seen here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Fawkham-footpaths-with-numbers-pdf.pdf>
- **Wildflower planting:** the wildflowers sown on the triangle of land at Rogers Wood Lane/ Gallows Wood and at Baldwins Green should flower again in 2024. We also took part in No Mow May, leaving the village green uncut, and encouraged residents to not mow their own grass.
- After carefully assessing the costs we anticipate will need funding by the **Parish precept** over the coming year, we were pleased to advise you that the total amount is the same as last year's figure. The Band D rate is £70.74, a reduction of 0.2% compared to last year.
- **Fawkham Village Hall:** FPC is the sole trustee for the village hall. Unfortunately serious structural issues came to light in November which has resulted in the hall's closure until they can be rectified. The issues relate to the method used to install replacement uPVC windows to the front and rear in 2010 and 2017. The hall's insurers have declined our claim, as it relates to poor workmanship, and the window installers do not have the required insurance in place to cover this issue. To fund the work, FPC is contributing CIL money (money received from development within the Parish), our local KCC member has contributed from his grant, and the hall's own reserves are being used. Various reports have been commissioned to ascertain the most appropriate method of repair, and work has just begun at the time of writing which we hope will be completed soon. Prior to closure, the hall had a good level of regular hirers, and we hope they will return when the hall reopens. A full report on the village hall is prepared for its AGM each May, and posted here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/village-hall/>.

**What are we most looking forward to in the next 12 months?** Looking ahead to the next 12 months, our key priority is to progress the **Neighbourhood Plan** to the examination stage, following which we hope to proceed to a referendum on its adoption.

**What issues and concerns should residents be aware of in the next 12 months?** SDC's **Local Plan** will also progress towards examination and we need to continue to represent the Parish's views, and will continue to consult residents on any further significant applications for development.

**Laura Evans**  
**Chair, Fawkham Parish Council**  
**April 2024**