

# Fontmell Magna Parish Council

## Annual Report for 2019/20

### 1. Introduction

This annual report summarises the activities of the Parish Council (PC) over the past year ending 30th April 2020. Whilst much of the PC's attention during the year was focussed on housing development and planning applications, the latter part has been overtaken by the impact of and responses to the Coronavirus pandemic.



### 2. Governance

PC meetings during the year were reduced to five, with the AGM and Annual Parish Meeting held in May, and subsequent meetings in July, September, November and March. The minutes of meetings of the PC and all significant associated documents are available on the Parish website

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

In May 2019, the PC's Chairman Howard Horstead and Councillor Leo Williams stood down after many years of service to the Council. The village community was saddened to learn that Leo Williams subsequently died in April 2020 after a short illness and his wife Priscilla also died shortly afterwards.

From May the council had a complement of only 4 councillors with Chris Bellers as chair. However in October Chris resigned to move nearer to family leaving the council with a complement of 3 councillors, the minimum number for a quorum. Thus for the majority of the year the responsibilities of councillors were:

	Area	Responsibilities	Who
1.	Planning	Planning applications, neighbourhood plan, Planning Working 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.	Annie
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
6.	Social Infrastructure	Maintenance of parish council assets, Best Kept Village, Home Watch, defibrillators, village shop, broadband and mobile coverage, recreation, allotments, Village Hall.	Annie
7.	Footpaths	Footpaths, rights of way, signposts.	Jeremy
8.	Trees	Applications for tree works, encouraging tree planting, TPOs.	Jeremy
9.	Governance	Procedures, standing orders, regulations, new councillor recruitment and induction, councillor training, committees, risk management, contingency planning.	Mike

With just 3 councillors, supported by the Clerk, the Council has struggled to fulfil its duties effectively. For a community of Fontmell Magna's size, with over 700 residents, this is a poor situation and needs to be improved urgently.

In March 2020 the council was delighted that a fourth resident came forward to join the team. This still leaves 3 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.

Happily, Fontmell has been very well-supported by its new County 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.

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

The county's new unitary authority in Dorset Council, established on 1st April 2019, has been setting up the structures and procedures needed. Several key services have been affected by large cuts in budgets and personnel, eg. libraries, buses, waste collection. Planning has been organised into three regional committees but it is too early to know if the views of Parish and Town Councils will carry effective weight in planning decisions.

### **3. Finance**

The financial year runs from April 2019-March 2020. The PC started the financial year with a balance of £9,027 and closed the year with a balance of £7,702.

Expenditure during the year totalled £9,749, which significantly exceeded the budget of £8,474 - by £1,275. The excess spend was primarily attributable to an unbudgeted one-off grant of £2,000 requested by the Village Hall Committee, to enable urgent improvements to the children's play area and to support essential maintenance work.

Main sources of income through the year were:

Parish precept	£8,500
Donations	£30
Interest	£13

The principal items of expenditure were:

Clerk's salary	£4,186
Insurance	£579
Maintenance/Noticeboard	£1,113
DAPTC/SLCC subs	£307
Training	£217
Website	£680
Grants	£2,400

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

The Parish precept for 2020/10 was set at £9,000. Precepts in previous years have been:

2019/20	£8,500
2018/19	£7,000
2017/18	£7,000
2016/17	£2,050
2015/16	£1,618
2014/15	£3,500

The PC will continue to carefully manage expenditure and to maintain a reserve approximately equivalent to one year's precept, ie. for 2020/21 this is c. £9,000.

#### 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.

In November 2018, the Fontmell Magna Neighbourhood Plan (FMNP) was made part of North Dorset's Local Plan. With Dorset Council's establishment in April 2019, the FMNP became temporarily part of Dorset's Local Plan whilst that plan undergoes an extensive review. The updated Dorset Plan is due to be published and approved in 2023.

Since its inception the FMNP 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	

Terms of Reference for the group are on the PC website; the Group reports back at each Parish Council meeting.

Through 2019/20 the PC has considered 18 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. The PC expresses its sincere thanks to the NPMG for their diligent work in monitoring the NP.

The major development on the south side of the village, a centre-piece of the Neighbourhood Plan, has not progressed beyond the planning application stage. The developers Pennyfarthing Homes have decided recently to submit a full planning application. Elsewhere a number of small developments are adding to the parish's housing stock.

A proposed large housing development on land along Mill Street, on the east side of the village, was refused planning permission. This development was not supported by the FMNP.

#### 5. Highways

Improvement works to the A350 by Dorset Highways, from Stourpaine through to Shaftesbury, have been completed with some notable improvements to speed restrictions, surfacing and signage through Fontmell Magna. An increasing number of HGVs are travelling south along the A350, despite a voluntary one-way scheme with the C13. Lobbying continued through the A350 Community Group for a long term solution to the problems of traffic along the A350/C13 corridor.

Local flooding along West Street by Pipers Mill continued to be problematic with lack of funding preventing a permanent solution.

The PC expresses its thanks to the local Speedwatch group who have been monitoring traffic speeds through the Village.

## 6. Parish Projects

During the year, the PC has sought to improve parish amenities and facilities, including:

- Upgrading the PC website to ensure compliance with disability legislation
- Repainting the War Memorial.
- Posting new dog waste labels.
- Installation of posts to protect the verge at Bedchester crossroads.
- Trimming the large lime tree at Bedchester crossroads.
- Community litter pick in November; unfortunately the Spring pick had to be cancelled.
- Acquiring the telephone box adjacent to Fontmell Village Shop.
- Maintenance of the defibrillator outside the School.



The PC investigated but for various reasons, including acknowledging neighbours' concerns, decided not to proceed with:

- Community bench at Bedchester crossroads.
- White Hart Link fingerpost along West Street.
- Supporting fund raising for the Village Shop.

A Community Land Trust has been formed by a group of residents to assess the potential to acquire the freehold of the Village Shop and explore other ways in which the shop business can be supported and improved. The PC supports this initiative and has become a member of the CLT.

At the March meeting the PC received a presentation by the Dorset National Park Team on the idea of creating a park along the Jurassic Coast. The PC's support for this is being considered and requires more logistical information.

At the May meeting the PC and residents who attended received a presentation by Chris Conroy of Dorset Police on protecting against cyber crime. A leaflet and online resources were provided.

## 7. Plans for 2020/21

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

- Supporting Dorset County initiatives in tackling the Climate Change emergency.
- Investigating and promoting the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the village.
- Promoting environmental "green" policies that help to provide and maintain habitat and food sources for local wildlife.
- Supporting local initiatives in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Conducting Parish Council meetings virtually.
- Updating the Neighbourhood Plan as its policies may cease to be current from November 2020 and would therefore carry less weight when Dorset Council decides on planning applications.
- Continuing to ensure planning applications are in line with FMNP policies.
- Continuing to support the A350 Community Group to obtain an improved North/South route.
- Liaising with Pennyfarthing Homes regarding the proposed development in South Street (see Appendix).
- Completing the PC website upgrade.
- Maintaining the War Memorial and other village facilities owned by the PC.
- Arranging community litter picks.

In order to pursue these initiatives, the PC will actively seek support and volunteers from the parish community.

The council would like to stress that residents are urged to come forward to fill the 3 councillor vacancies. The PC needs to be at full strength to be effective in representing the community and dealing with the varied issues that arise as it endeavours 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 all those who work to bring us The Gossip Tree especially the new joint editors and the committee chair for ensuring this important publication continues, in both paper and electronic forms. Thanks to Cllr. Somper for her support and regular updates. And a special thanks to all who have served as parish councillors during the year, and to the Clerk, for their work in supporting the parish.

MH/FMPC/June 2020

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

