

FINCHINGFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 2014/15

A copy of this review will be placed on the Parish Council website: www.finchingfield-pc.gov.uk

The highlight of the year was the Tour de France coming through the centre of Finchingfield on Monday 7th July, watched by 8-10,000 spectators here and by many hundreds of millions around the world on television. Photographs of the racers coming through the village was the main picture in most national newspapers.

What is not widely known is that although the French race organisers and their agents deal with the road route, everything else is left to the local authorities and parishes to organise. In Finchingfield, this involved hiring 24 hour security over three days to ensure the village centre did not end up covered in campervans, cars and motor bikes, a sufficient number of public toilets were in place to cope with the number of visitors expected, designating two visitor car parks either side of the village and hiring a traffic management company to manage them, arranging signage and ensuring sufficient rubbish bins and bags were available throughout the day. The parish council underwrote the costs.

I want to acknowledge and thank the small team that worked with me to ensure the day was a great success: Janet Dixon, Archie Ruggles-Brise, Stuart Crow, Cllrs Kelly Bishop, Austin Davies and Geoff Powdrill and Kate Fox.

The day proved a fantastic experience in all respects, everybody enjoyed themselves and costs were recovered from parking charges and fees from trade concessions on the Greens. In fact, a surplus of £3,400 was made and this has been devoted to supporting two community projects: FinCHE Youth project to install a zip wire and to help the re-established Indoor Bowls Club to buy new carpets.

Parish Maintenance Programme

The parish council has continued to operate an annual maintenance programme, first introduced some years ago, to keep the areas of public space in both villages in good condition and visually attractive to all, whether residents or visitors, the young or those not so young. This programme is regularly reviewed and budgeted for.

Planning Issues

Braintree Council's draft Local Plan, which identified the main areas for future housing development, was withdrawn as housing targets by the Government were increased and a new Local Plan is required. Finchingfield Parish Council have put forward the view that all future major developments should take place in the towns and larger villages and that the rural parishes should have individual developments based on proven local need.

More recently the planning officers at Braintree District Council have proposed that more planning decisions should be made by them and not go to Planning Committee. At present, an objection to an application by a parish council or a large number of residents would lead to the application being dealt with by the district planning committee, comprising elected councillors. If what the planners propose is approved this will no longer be the case unless the Chair of the planning committee believes the issue is sufficiently important. The problem is, a major issue to local residents may be considered minor in the context of a district. Also, given the lack of protection in the absence of a Local Plan, such a change at this time seems irresponsible.

The majority of planning applications during the last year in the parish have been extensions to properties. Overall the number of applications has increased, presumably reflecting the growth in the economy.

The United Reform Church has closed and recently approval was given to a change of use to offices for Mountain Healthcare Ltd, a local company that needed larger premises. The parish council supported the application.

There has been a recent application to convert one of the shop premises at The Causeway and Bridge junction to a fish and chip takeaway, open seven days a week including bank holidays between 11am and about 9pm in the evening. The Council submitted an objection due to parking issues, increased rubbish and whether this would be an appropriate business in the centre of a conservation area. A decision has not been made at the time of writing this review.

Highways and Parking Issues

Earlier in the year and before the Tour de France the race road was resurfaced and has been a very welcome improvement. More recently, Bardfield Road coming in to Finchingfield has also been resurfaced, but there remain a considerable number of potholes in the parish that need filling.

The North Essex Parking Partnership has arranged a considerable increase in the frequency in which traffic enforcement officers visit Finchingfield. However, there is a reluctance to issue penalty notices as a matter of policy and as a result motor cycles and vehicles do move off double yellow lines when officers are in the village but parking on them resumes after they have left. For example, during May and June last year there were twenty six visits by officers but only three penalty notices were issued. The Council's view is that penalty notices should be issued more frequently, particularly for persistent offenders, so as to prove a deterrent.

At the Parish Assembly last year, a number of suggestions were outlined to help relieve resident parking problems in those areas that appear to have insufficient off-road parking spaces. These were in response to the high number of people in the parish plan questionnaire agreeing that Finchingfield had an inadequate parking provision. Although

the number of residents giving their view on the suggestions has not been large, the response has been a negative one.

Policing

There has been the lack of a regular police presence both in this parish and generally in the rural areas. It has been reported previously that the number of villages each neighbourhood police team covers has grown.

It would appear that policing in the rural areas is primarily by PSCOs rather than police officers. It has also been suggested by the Chief Constable's office that parishes should consider employing and paying for their own PCSOs.

Income and Expenditure

The Parish Council continues to work within its budget. In addition to the grants it makes towards the cost of maintaining church grounds and clocks and the support it gives to both village halls and Finchingfield playing fields, the Council contributed half the cost of repairing the Scout Hut walls and very recently a further £2400 was given towards the cost of repairing the Hut's roof. Nearly four thousand pounds was spent on playground equipment during the year using existing playingfield reserves.

The continued reduction in the level of financial support received from the district council, in recognition that rural council tax payers contribute to some services in the towns that they get no benefit from, has put pressure on the precept here. For example, the increase of 2.1% in the parish council element of the Council Tax for 2015/16 is entirely to offset the reduction in district support. Last year I reported that the cost and responsibility of maintaining the public toilets in Stephen Marshall Avenue now fall upon the parish council.

Council Membership

Councillor Jonathan Goodfellow resigned early in the year on health grounds and Alison Stanger was elected his replacement in the Finchingfield ward in a contested election in July. Cllr Kelly Bishop resigned for business and family reasons later in the year for the Cornish Hall End ward and the co-option process was not undertaken given how close to the parish council election in May 2015.

The names of the eight current councillors and their respective contact numbers is given at the back of the Annual Parish Report.

I would like to formally thank both the parish clerk and finance officer for their work on behalf of the council.

Graham Tobbell

Chairman, Finchingfield Parish Council