

Four Marks Newsletter



www.fourmarks-pc.org.uk

A note from the Chairperson



This past year has been a busy time for the Parish Council, with the first contested election for over thirty years taking place in 2023.

As a result of this, and the later by-election in November 2023, there is a full compliment of ten Councillors, with nine of them being new to the Parish Council world. The strapline of the Parish Council is 'First the Community' and through the use of our delegated statutory powers, we aim to represent the interests of the community, maintain our wonderful portfolio of open spaces and deliver projects that will benefit all.

In terms of Council responsibilities, I am sure there are areas and tasks looked after and completed by the Parish Council that would surprise many residents. The Council looks after several Open Space areas in addition to the Recreation Ground, including the badger sett and orchard at Badger Close, the area and car park around Oak Green Parade, Swelling Hill Pond and Kingswood Copse to name a few. One project in particular which has been popular is the addition of car parking spaces at the Recreation Ground and the emergency works undertaken to remedy the large pot holes in the same area.

Councillors want to hear from the residents of Four Marks and work to get the solutions that you want. Two of our Councillors sit on a Highways Liaison Panel with HCC and a key focus is trying to sort out the flooding at 'five lanes end' which I know affects so many of our community.

Many of you will already know that the provision of a new community building was a project initialised by the previous Parish Council. This Council made the decision to appoint an external agency in order to help establish and evidence what is right and appropriate for our growing community. I understand that people do have questions about this project, but please trust that behind the scenes, a great deal of work is going on in order to get this right. If you are a group or organisation within the village, the chances are that you have already been contacted so that the agency can help asses what our village really needs.

The Parish Council acts as a Statutory Consultee on Planning Applications within Four Marks and immediate areas. We, as Councillors, will always try to best represent what we believe is suitable, sustainable and appropriate for the area. Many of you may have 'tuned in' to the public inquiry into the Gladman/Mount Royal planning application appeal, where one of our Councillors, Paul McAllister made a representation along with other community groups. As you read this, the Council will have already made it's response to the EHDC Draft Local Plan Consultation. Planning comments, issues and considerations take up a great deal of Council time and is such a priority in the current climate.

A key aim of this Council is to engage with the community and we hope in the near future to run a series of Councillor Surgeries. The first of these will be held at Garthowen Garden Centre on Saturday 16th March 2024 from 10am-12pm. We would love for you to come and share your thoughts with us.

Best Wishes,

Howard Briggs, Chairperson, Four Marks Parish Council.

Annual Parish
Meeting
24th April, 7pm
FM Village Hall

- DONNA JONES, POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER - GUEST SPEAKER
- Refreshments served from 6.30pm.
- Meet District and Parish Councillors
- Community Recognition Awards.



Review
2023/2024



VILLAGE PICNIC

May 2023 - Parish Council hosted a picnic to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. The sun shone and everyone had a brilliant day!



Summer 2023 - Wildflower patch created at Lymington Bottom Green with a helping hand from Four Marks Environmental Group. We now have a haven for bees, butterflies and other wildlife.



WILDFLOWERS



CHRISTMAS CAROLS

December 2023 - the Council hosted 'Carols around the Tree' and invited residents to come and join together. The Church of the Good Shepherd supported with carol singing and the local businesses donated mulled wine and mince pies. There was a great turnout and the Council looks forward to hosting this event again this year.



Two new benches have been installed. One is a memorial bench at the Cemetery, which was funded with a District Councillor grant award from Councillor Neal Day.



The second is a very special bench which commemorates the life of Clive Hawkins, a much loved Four Marks resident. A huge thank you goes to Jo Walters who set up a fundraising page where the community donated money towards the bench which was then topped up by the Four Marks News. The bench has been locally crafted and sits outside the allotments.

SOMEWHERE TO SIT



The bird boxes produced by Four Marks Cubs now sit at the Recreation Ground - can you spot them? The project is to be used in a promotional video for EHDC District Councillor Community grant funding. You may have also seen our hedgerow improvements along the allotment border at Jubilee Green.

In addition to the specific projects, the Council is working hard to work with enforcement at EHDC to help with the issue of dog fouling at the Recreation Ground.



WILDLIFE

Spotlight on Swelling Hill Pond



Cllr Tim Gebbett reflects on Swelling Hill Pond

We are lucky in Four Marks to have a very unusual natural feature in Swelling Hill Pond. It's the highest pond in Hampshire sitting on top of a clay cap covering the chalk strata.

The pond served as a watering hole for cattle and oxen having been driven up Swelling Hill for hundreds of years, but gradually fell out of use. By the late 1960's it had silted up and became more of a bog than a pond. So, in the early 1970's the Parish Council took possession of the Pond and started a restoration program with local volunteers and in 1975 won the Daily Telegraph award for the "Best Restored Pond in the UK" – there is a plaque in the Village Hall to commemorate their success.

Over the following 50 years the Pond has proved to be a very popular walking destination for people of all ages and of course provides an essential refuge for wildlife of all types. It's also a very attractive and quiet location for people to relax and enjoy the country side.

Since then, the maintenance of the pond has been carried out to greater or lesser extent by the Parish Council according to needs and funding available. However, it has become apparent over the last few years that a major effort was required to avoid the pond silting up again, the water level in the middle has reduced to approx. 1 metre! Having obtained specialist quotes for a complete de-silting of the pond, the Parish Council applied for a grant from EHDC in September 2023 and after a few delays this was granted under S106 funding in late December 2023. This is the second time a complete de-silting of the pond has taken place in the last 50 years, suggesting that this work will keep the pond as a valued local amenity for residents and sanctuary for wildlife for another 25 years.

The removed silt has been contained within the area around the pond ensuring that the micro-organisms essential to the ponds health are retained. Plans are also in place to re-instate footpaths once the silt dries out and undertake some selective replanting in and around the pond.



What is the Council doing about speeding?

You have told us that as Parishioners, speeding is one of your real concerns. We have taken steps to try and help.

EHDC have set aside funding for Automatic Speedwatch Cameras and until recently it was not considered suitable for the Parish to apply, however, after recent discussions with the local constabulary and a change in technology, the Council has been working to obtain the correct license and apply for funding for three of these cameras which will be placed strategically along the A31. We are delighted to have been awarded the funds and aim to deliver this project as soon as possible.

These units will record the speed, vehicle identification and time etc. Reports will show hotspots for the police to target, and they will also provide average speed data of vehicles passing through the village.

The Parish Council appreciates the efforts of the local Speedwatch team and will continue to work with them to monitor and put a stop to speeding in our community. Just remember the higher the speed at a collision, the more chance there is of serious injury or fatality.

Our message to everyone is **SLOW DOWN** in and around Four Marks.



WHAT'S NEXT?



The Council are working with the Badger Protection Agency to undertake some improvement works to the Badger Orchard at Badger Close. This will involve planting new fruit trees and making a better area for wildlife. Get in touch if you would like to help!



SOMETHING TO READ?

The Parish Council has recently commissioned Alresford Mens Shed to create a new book house for Oak Green parade. In 2022, the community bookshelf was created by a resident but the Council decided to enhance the project and provide a waterproof destination for the books.



ANYONE FOR TENNIS?



The resurfacing of the Multi Use Games Areas and tennis courts may well have begun as you read this newsletter. The tennis courts have been in desperate need of this for a number of years and although the tennis club has disbanded, the money that they accumulated through fundraising and grants was transferred to the Council so that the project could be completed. The basketball court and mini court resurfacing will be completed using CIL funding.

The tennis court booking system will now be administered by the Parish Council through ClubSpark and there will be the option to have an annual membership or Pay as You Go. The Council also intends to offer free tennis to schools and youth groups so that children have the opportunity to play.



VISION PLANNING

In December 2023, Councillors met with members of the community to discuss vision planning for the village and came up with some points that will shape short term, mid terms and long terms plan for our village. Please come along to the Annual Parish meeting to find out further information. Ultimately, this will determine the projects that the Council takes on in the years to come.



LITTER PICK



VILLAGE PICNIC



CAROLS AROUND THE TREE



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY





The money bit....

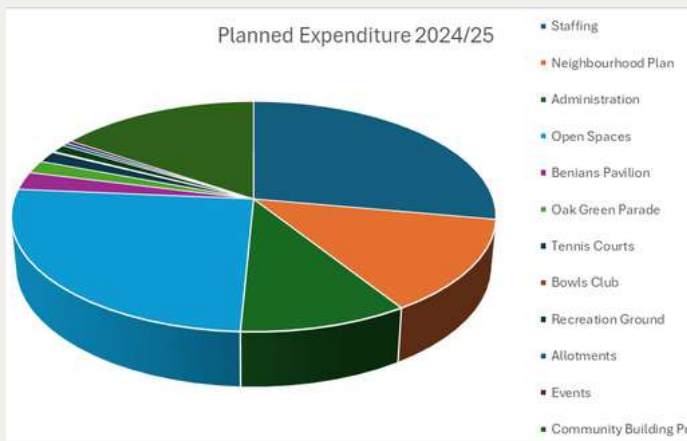
“Make it exciting” the Clerk said when requesting a few words on the Council’s finances. No pressure there then!

Shortly every household in the village will receive its annual Council Tax bill. Just over 4% of that bill will be your contribution to the work of the Parish Council. In local government we talk about an average Council Tax bill as being that for a **Band D** household and if that’s you then you will be paying **£86.20** a year towards this Council – if you live in a Band H house then the charge is doubled to £172.40 a year. Compared with the financial year 2023/24 those charges represent an increase of 7.5p a week (£3.92 per year) at Band D and 15.1p a week (£7.84 extra a year) at Band H.

The new budget targets enhanced community support with provision for community events and an increased sum available for grants to local organisations. Additional budget has also been provided to cover maintenance of the Recreation Ground, Badger Orchard and Swelling Hill Pond. The increase includes £1,000 to cover anticipated increases in staff salaries and a further £1,000 to cover increased energy costs.

The Council’s budget also continues to provide for the costs of the Community Building Project. A parish council has perpetual succession and is bound by the decisions of previous administrations (unless it makes a formal decision to reverse a previous decision). Consequent upon last year’s decision to proceed with a new community building, a planning application is progressing through the system and the budget must provide for this. In 2024/25 (as in 2023/24) there is budget to cover the costs (mainly professional fees) associated with developing the project and steering it through the planning process. While these may be “one-off” costs – if a community building is delivered the budget will need to be retained indefinitely to cover the running costs (and loan costs) of the building.

Louise Steele, RFO



Staffing	63,500.00
Neighbourhood Plan	30,000.00
Administration	22,300.00
Open Spaces	58,500.00
Benians Pavilion	5,766.00
Oak Green Parade	4,124.00
Tennis Courts	3,600.00
Bowls Club	390.00
Recreation Ground	2,500.00
Allotments	1,000.00
Events	1,000.00
Community Building Project	35,500.00
NET TOTAL	228,180.00

introducing your PARISH COUNCILLORS



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Full Council and Committee meeting dates on the
website - come along and have your say!



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