

After 1949, momentum grew for the creation of a civil parish for Felbridge, but it took a further four years to achieve. By 1951, Godstone Rural District Council was satisfied that there was a case for making Felbridge into a separate parish and informed the Felbridge Ratepayer's Association that they would be making a representation to Surrey County Council. Finally, in 1953, the Civil Parish of Felbridge was formed, which incorporated most of Godstone (Detached), the Southern part of Tandridge and the South Eastern corner of Horne that had fallen under the administration of Godstone Rural District Council.

The 1st meeting of the civil parish of Felbridge was held Wednesday 1st April 1953, chaired by Nancy McIver, with approximately seventy people in attendance. The Clerk of Godstone RDC managed the procedural requirements of announcing the winners of the Parish Council election:

Richard Back, of Bosworth House, Copthorne Road, Felbridge
 Nancy McIver, of Woodcock, Woodcock Hill, Felbridge
 Lancelot Sanderson, (Captain, RN Rtd.), of Homestead, Copthorne Road, Felbridge
 Arthur Fry, of Double Dee, London Road, Felbridge
 John Phillips, (Wing Commander, Rtd.), of Copthorne Cottage, Copthorne Road, Felbridge
 Charles Wheeler, of Brockworth, Crawley Down Road, Felbridge
 Frank Glover, of Bitterne, Rowplatt Lane, Felbridge.

The first meeting of the Felbridge Parish Council was held 16th April 1953, chaired by Richard Back, who was elected as chairman, with Arthur Fry being elected as vice-chairman. The Parish Council had received, from the Clerk of Godstone Rural District Council, Mr F W Walpole, a copy of the Order for the formation of the civil parish of Felbridge, together with the official map indicating the boundaries, and it was agreed that the map should be framed and hung in an appropriate place in the parish. The position of Clerk of the Parish Council was discussed and it was agreed that the salary should be £25 for the first year, rising to £30 for the following year. It was also agreed that a suitable person for the position would be Mr W G Phillips, of Pinecroft, Lake View Road, Furnace Wood, Felbridge, as he was a retired War Office clerk. The Parish Council was responsible at this time for maintenance of all public footpaths and street lighting, but there were only 13 street lamps in the whole of the parish! Funding was agreed to install new street lights every year until 1973 when the District Council took back the responsibility for street lighting.

Felbridge is a small civil parish and the Parish Council concerns itself mainly with items and events within the parish. The Parish Council has seven elected members who provide their time voluntarily and who work for the benefit of the parish as a whole; the only position receiving payment is that of the Parish Clerk. Initially, one person took the position of chairman until their resignation from the Parish Council, but in 1975, the decision was made that the position of chairman would be elected annually; preventing any one individual from dominating the Parish Council for a sustained period of time.

With the formation of the civil parish, the Parish Council was eager to define the bounds of the parish with the erection of 'Felbridge' nameplates in 1953, which were erected at three places:

- 1) Outside the Lincoln Imp at the foot of Woodcock Hill (now the site of Fresco's) on the A22
- 2) At the Felcot Farm bus stop on the Copthorne Road (now in the Furnace Wood lay-by after straightening the A264),
- 3) On the Crawley Down Road at Leaping Well (now the site of Patbarossa, currently up for re-development after a fire destroyed the property in the 1990's).

The last of these original nameplates to survive was the one outside the Lincoln Imp, and all have been replaced at least twice over the past fifty years, the most recent being erected by Tandridge District Council. Concerns from the onset in 1953, centred on roads, in particular speeding through the village, especially on the Copthorne Road and Rowplatt Lane, the possibility of the proposed by-pass, with the uncertainty of the route it would take. A pressing concern for the Parish Council was the fact that even in 1953, the parish of Felbridge had no main drainage and all houses were on cesspools only, resulting in a major and on-going problem of over-flowing sewage. Apart from policing the problem and contacting culprits to rectify their leakage, the Parish Council made an early resolution to link up to a main drainage scheme and by 1963, a new sewage scheme had been installed to many areas of Felbridge, although even today, some areas, like Furnace Wood, are still without main drainage.

Even in the 1950's the civil parish of Felbridge was under attack from developers. The policy of the Parish Council has always been to oppose back-garden development and encroachments into the Green Belt areas, although a certain amount of in-fill would be tolerated.

Running alongside the commitment to Green Belt areas, the Parish Council has always been committed to protecting the countryside and environment of the parish and community of Felbridge. It is through their efforts that many of the ornamental trees within the former grounds of Felbridge Place, now Whittington College and Arkendeale, have been retained, But for Parish Council intervention, the Evelyn Chestnuts that have graced the Crawley Down Road and the line of the old Hedgecourt Road, (located in Twitten Lane, the copse behind the Village Hall and within the School ground), since 1714, would also be a memory as Godstone RDC instructed tree surgeons to fell them and Parish Councillors formed a human chain around each tree as it was being threatened until the chainsaws left the area.

Another major environmental concern over the years has been the problem of flooding in the vicinity of Hedgecourt Lake. On investigation it was found that the spillway level was about 12 ins/30cm higher than the level indicated on the ordnance survey maps of 1908, as a result there is occasional overtopping of the dam, resulting in the Copthorne Road flooding, to a depth of 18ins/45cms in 1974. The spillway has now been lowered.

During the 1950's many concerns were voiced by the residents of the parish, things that today are considered the norm. There was the problem of parking on grass verges, even outside ones own house, the appearance of touring caravans being parked in people's gardens, ugly road signs, the clearance of rabbits, and the keeping of chicken. Added to these, there were the concerns, that are still relevant today, litter, horse riding on the Village Green, the recreation or play area, hooliganism and anti-social behaviour 'by certain lads', loss of the village 'Bobby', who retired in 1966, speeding through the village, the junction at the end of Crawley Down Road, the lack of a pedestrian crossing across Copthorne Road, and dumped cars, yes even in 1958!

As far back as 1956, The Parish Council has requested that something be done to minimise the risk of accidents at the junction of Crawley Down Road with Copthorne Road. It succeeded in implementing minor changes, at least allowing small vehicles to turn left along the A264, which at one time was an impossible feat without crossing into the lane of on coming traffic from the Crawley direction. The Parish Council campaigned for the crossing on the Copthorne Road.

In 1970, another plan was published for an East Grinstead and Felbridge By-pass, at least 'by-pass' was what the proposed route would have done for East Grinstead, 'divide in two' was more appropriate for the parish of Felbridge, as the preferred route cut straight across the Village Green. The Parish Council organised a local discussion meeting that resulted in the formation of the By-pass Action Group, and held a postal referendum for the electorate of the Felbridge parish. The public meeting and the referendum clearly indicated that within Felbridge there was a total opposition to the proposed route.

Since 1970, the M23 and the M25 have been built, and Gatwick Airport has been extended. It is hard to believe, but in the 1960's concerns were being voiced about the parking and congestion outside the School, particularly at the end of the school day. One has to remember that at this time, there had been no back-garden development in Felbridge, and there were only about sixty children on the school register, most living in the village and many of whom came from no car families. What would they make of the situation today, with over 200 pupils, many of whom do not live in the village and travel to school by car,

In 1989, the Boundary Commission proposed that Felbridge should become part of West Sussex, however, they neglected to consult the Felbridge Parish Council about the proposals, and were unaware that while they wanted Felbridge to become part of West Sussex, Felbridge and Surrey County Council had other ideas and wanted to extend their boundaries South to Felbridge Water, to encompass South of Crawley Down Road and the whole of Furnace Wood, thus taking land away from West Sussex.

This action would have made it difficult for any future development of that area of Green Belt, and would have helped secure the Surrey County Council's policy of retaining Felbridge as a village without expanding its boundaries and sprawling into another conurbation. It was felt by the Parish Council that the Boundary Commission had no idea of the situation in Felbridge, and it was widely believed that they did not even know that Felbridge was a parish in its own right, which might have explained why notification of the proposed changes had not been forwarded to Felbridge Parish Council. Eventually a mass of protests persuaded the Boundary Commission to leave Felbridge in Surrey, but the Parish Council was far from happy. It wanted to see the whole of the village moved into Surrey, with Felbridge Water as the natural boundary, which had been agreed with Surrey and West Sussex several years previously.

It is from the people of the parish that the Parish Council is formed, a small group of seven who give their time, freely, for the benefit of the parish, and today, with the growth of the parish, it is even more important that there is a Parish Council, to ensure TDC and Surrey CC are provided with a local response in line with the views of its residents.

5. REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Felbridge Parish Council met for first time in April 1953 and this month we celebrate our Platinum or 70th anniversary. Felbridge Parish Councillors are voluntary and give their time freely receiving no payment. Parish councils have little immediate responsibility for local matters but are here to represent the interests of the Felbridge community to ensure that residents' concerns and views are represented and heard at District and County level. The council spend the majority of their time on planning, road maintenance - both hot topics just now, pavement and footpath issues. The Parish council are careful to respond on all planning applications endeavouring to be consistent in our responses such as protecting the green belt. I am sure this can at times seem overly harsh, however, we can only hope to ensure that more significant applications for development on green belt are refused if we show constraint on all development within this area. To date around Felbridge, little development has occurred within the greenbelt and nothing of notable size, despite applications from time to time.

Due to our location on the Sussex/Surrey border we are affected more than some towns and villages by planning which doesn't fall under Tandridge, but does impact us. This past year there have been additions to current developments on CDR as well as new proposals and applications for sites on the Imberhorne Farm area, all of which fall under the Mid Sussex planning authority. Councillors have attended consultations, asked questions and put forward suggestions. We are very aware of the impact that these developments **will have and the effect** on peoples use and love of the Gullege and Imberhorne countryside. Many of you may be aware that Barratt Homes have just submitted an application for 200 properties on land behind the football and Tennis club, Queen Elizabeth II Field.

As this is a new application the Parish council will be submitting a new robust response and strongly urging Tandridge and Surrey Highways to do the same. It is very important that residents also submit responses to this application. Any previous responses will not be included.

Comments can be submitted on the Mid Sussex Planning Portal. FPC will continue to put pressure on the various authorities and developers to achieve the best possible outcome for all. Our planning chairman Jeremy Clarke and Surrey CC Lesley Steeds have met with developers, highways and planners this year. One developer so impressed with Jeremy's planning and highways knowledge suggested he should work for them. We are delighted that he declined.

MSDC benefits from council tax and developer contributions from these new homes which to date have been or allocated for spending in Mid Sussex rather than Felbridge. For example, none of the funding for play and leisure from these developments was allocated to the Felbridge playground although new residents are most likely to use the Village Hall play area a very short distance from their homes. Whilst this can be frustrating, it is not unique to Felbridge. However, FPC and in particular our clerk Pat continue to negotiate with neighbouring authorities to ensure any services or funds possible are sent our way and used to benefit our community.

As Felbridge has the dubious pleasure of two A roads meeting in the village we see a large number of cars & heavy lorries pass through every day. Add to this poor road maintenance and bad weather and you have plenty of issues. Potholes have been particularly bad on the A264 this year and we continue to wait for West Park road to be re-surfaced as Surrey Highways have promised. Councillors and our clerk continue to report maintenance issues to Surrey highways and we urge residents to do the same. The more reports from different quarters the more likely Highways are to respond. Jeremy and Lesley will be meeting with Surrey Highways again this year to discuss highways matters.

In 2006 alongside the Parish council 4 local parents formed an association to raise funds for new play equipment. Over £60,000 was raised and in 2007 the newly expanded and renovated playground was opened by our then District Councillor - Ken Harwood. The enlargement of the area and addition of picnic tables has made a wonderful space for families. Unfortunately it was not possible at the time to replace the swings, however, it has remained on the parish councils agenda to do so as soon as further funds could be sourced. The playground is now 16 years old and not only are we keen to replace the swings but the surfacing is in need of work as are one or two of the smaller pieces of equipment. We are currently working towards sourcing funding from developer contributions to help with renovations and very much hope that this year we will be able to make definite plans for the future of the playground and are looking at other options for older children to enjoy.

In the last year we have added an outdoor table tennis table and replaced the basketball hoop and new goalposts which will shortly be installed. We also continue to provide a temporary toilet in the village hall grounds through the Spring and Summer months. Over the years FPC have added benches, noticeboards and various planting from spring bulbs to trees around the village. This year to mark the Coronation we are installing a planter by the Felbridge Parish Gate on the site where the telephone box once stood. It is a prominent position seen from road or pavement and footpath and we hope that it will be a bright addition to the village.

This year the Parish Council has increased its precept which is paid through your council tax by £2.70 a year per band D home. This is first increase since 2020. Felbridge have the lowest precept level amongst the 7 parishes in the Lingfield Division and the 5th lowest in Tandridge.

Next month we will have a vacancy and be seeking a new Parish councillor. If anyone would like to know more please speak with Pat our Parish Clerk or any of the parish councillors. Further information about Felbridge Parish Council can be found on FB and our website where all our minutes, agendas and much other information can be found.

I would like to close by thanking all the councillors for their time and dedication. Particularly our excellent county councillor Lesley Steeds who works tirelessly for the six local parishes. Lesley has another two years to serve and I know I for one will be hoping that she will want to fight on for many more years after that. Thank you Lesley

Also Georgina who is sadly not here this evening. Georgina was chair before I took over last May. She has served on the council for eight years and her planning knowledge has been extremely useful. Georgina is moving out of the area so can no longer serve on FPC. We wish her all the best for the future and for the arrival of her baby due next month..

I know all the councillors would like to thank Jeremy Clarke our planning chair. His dedication to all council matters but particularly planning is invaluable. Residents probably don't realise just how fortunate they are to have such a dedicated and knowledgeable person looking out for our corner of Surrey

Finally a big thankyou to Pat our clerk without whom we would all, but particularly me, struggle to serve Felbridge as well as we try to do. Pat is not only very knowledgeable on parish matters ensuring that we operate in the correct manner, she is also our financial officer. Pat chases, cajoles and negotiates with district, county, developers and other authorities on behalf of all residents. If Pat can't make it happen no one can. Thank you Pat.

6. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

The one topic which is clearly causing considerable upset and anger locally is MSDC's excessive development on the Felbridge border. More than 120 dwellings have already been built or are under construction. Residents voiced most concerns regarding the latest application from Barratt Homes to build 200 dwellings to either side of the Gullege Bridleway with two access points opening on the Crawley Down Road. This site was approved by MSDC councillors as suitable for development through their Site Allocations DPD process. Nor has the impact on the Star Junction been acknowledged or addressed. FPC are working to ensure that accurate traffic data is used to assess traffic impact since the data which has been previously presented was outdated and did not take into account the impact of the other three developments.

Issues with roadworks, damaged road surfaces and developer parking were also raised with much of this being linked to the MSDC developments too. The Crawley Down Road was currently closed for two weeks. In October 2022 the works lasted three weeks. This time there was also a lane closure on the Copthorne Road. HGVs ignoring the signs and using Rowplatt Lane was also mentioned.

Another subject was the damage to the Gullege Bridleway caused by flooding. There are concerns that this could be linked to the new developments since they have been built on green fields alongside Felbridge Water. Again, this location comes under Mid Sussex/West Sussex. The damage was reported in December and WSCC have a sign in place saying that the bridleway will remain closed until repairs can be made.

The meeting closed at 7.15pm

Patricia Slatter
Clerk to Felbridge Parish Council

