

Council History

THE EVOLUTION OF FERRING PARISH COUNCIL.

The first 100 years: 1919 – 2019

Ferring has been served since 1889 by **West Sussex County Council** (there never was a single 'Sussex' County Council). Then, in 1894, the Local Government Act established the **District Councils**. Ferring was at first served by **East Preston Rural District Council**, until 1933, then by **Worthing Rural District Council** until 1974 and subsequently by **Arun District Council**, which remains the case today (Arun District Council was formed on 1 April 1974, under the Local Government Act 1972, merging the Urban Districts of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, the municipal borough of Arundel and parts of Chichester and Worthing Rural Districts). The 1894 Local Government Act also obliged parishes to hold annual meetings (known as the **Annual Parish Meeting**) of its electors and allowed the County Councils to set up **Parish Councils** in rural areas, where that was requested by the local electors.

A parish council is a civil local authority found in England and is the first tier of local government. It is an elected corporate body, has variable tax raising powers and is responsible for a geographical area known as a civil parish.

It was at Ferring's Annual Parish Meeting of 24th. March 1919, that discussion turned to whether Ferring should become an independent Parish in its own right and it was decided to bid to establish a Parish Council. The bid was successful and accordingly, a special Parish Meeting was called for the election of Ferring Parish Councillors, to be held in the school on Tuesday 23rd. September, 1919. At the meeting, the Revd. A. Bagot-Chestor took the Chair and the Sealed Order from West Sussex County Council establishing a Council for Ferring was formally read. Six nomination papers had been received from prospective councillors for the five available posts and declared valid. Five were from Ferring residents and one from Mr Candy, a 'Gentleman' of Kingston (not then a Parish in its own right). A vote was taken to elect the five councillors required. Mr. Candy received the lowest number of votes (2) and

was not elected. The five candidates duly elected were Revd. Hector William Grepe, the new Vicar of Ferring (6 votes); Revd. A. Bagot-Chester, curate (5 votes); Mr. George Penfold, farmer, of Hangleton Farm (5 votes); Mr. Peter Tourle, carpenter, of Holly Lodge, Church Lane (5 votes); Mrs. Alma Georgina Henty of Ferring Grange (4 votes). Subsequently, the date for the first Ferring Parish Council meeting was set for Friday 10th October 1919, again to be held in the school (as continued to be the case for many years).

At the inaugural meeting of **Ferring Parish Council**, Revd. Hector William Grepe was 'voted-in' for the annual term as Chairman. The necessary formalities were then conducted, including the appointment of Mr. White, the Manager, Lloyds Bank Ltd., Worthing Branch, as Treasurer. The Clerk, already serving as Assistant Overseer and Collector of Rates for Ferring, for which he received a salary of £12 per annum, asked for a revision of his salary to reflect the additional duties required as Clerk to the Parish Council. An additional £5 was granted, making a total of £17 per annum. There was now a functioning parish council for Ferring.

Annual Parish Meetings still continue to this day as a separate entity to the statutory Annual Meeting of Ferring Parish Council.

The **Annual Parish Meeting** (est. 1894): This consists of the local government representatives and the residents of a parish. It usually contains presentations of reports by the Parish Council and by District and County Councillors. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss parish affairs with residents.

The statutory **Annual Meeting of Ferring Parish Council**: The principal business and first agenda items are to elect a Chairman and then a Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council. Now, the committee structure is also likely to be agreed at this meeting and the normal business of the council proceeds in accordance with the published agenda.

As the population of Ferring and the diversity of responsibilities grew, so did the quota of Parish Councillors. This was increased from its initial five in 1919 (plus a Clerk) to seven in 1934, then nine in 1937. The quota is now 12,

currently supported by two part-time employees; a Parish Clerk and an Administrative Assistant, based in Ferring's own Parish Office.

The Borough of Worthing made several attempts, over the years, to incorporate Ferring into an enlarged council with 'County Borough' powers like Brighton (this would have extinguished the Parish Council, as happened in Goring in 1929), but these approaches were always rebuffed by the Parish Council and the Ferring electors.

In 1972, a Local Government Act (following the Redcliffe-Maud Report), dramatically re-organised local government with amalgamations of district councils, large-scale changes to county boundaries and the creation of metropolitan areas. However, the parish council was retained as the "grass-roots" tier of local democracy for rural areas. The Act also recognised the role of parish councils in development planning in their parish and gave them the right to be informed and consulted on applications for such development. The original proposal to grant a general power of competence to councils was not carried through and the doctrine of *ultra vires* (the legal term for a corporation or an officer or director of a corporation performing an act without legal authority) remained. This meant that parish councils could not do anything outside their statutory powers.

It was not until the **Localism Act, of 2011**, that eligible parish councils were freed of the constraints of ultra vires and were given a radical new power to 'do anything that individuals generally may do' as long as it is not limited by some other Act. This is known as the "General Power of Competence" (GPC). An eligible council is one which has resolved to adopt the GPC, with at least two-thirds of its members being declared elected, rather than co-opted, and the Clerk must hold an appropriate qualification. This was adopted by Ferring Parish Council in 2017.

The Localism Act also introduced new rights and powers to allow local communities to shape new development by coming together to prepare neighbourhood plans. This was taken up by Ferring Parish Council, having successfully bid for government grant funding, jointly with Kingston Parish Council. Following work undertaken by community-led working parties and

by the Parish Council and its technical consultants, public consultations and review by a government-appointed Inspector, the Ferring Neighbourhood Plan was overwhelmingly accepted in the local referendum of December 2014. The 'made' Neighbourhood Plan was subsequently adopted into the Arun District Council Local Plan.

For more details about Ferring Parish Council today, what it does, the Neighbourhood Plan, its Councillors, Committees and Staff, please select a tab under Main Menu item 'The Parish Council'.

Information for this article has been taken from various sources including the parish council minute books, held at the West Sussex Record Office, archive newspaper reports and government websites.

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Stephen Abbott, Ferring History Group. September, 2019.