

Cllr Barbara Jones -Williams
2022 Annual Parish report

I have represented Martley Ward on Malvern Hills District Council for 27 years; I feel very privileged and proud to do so.

I have had yet another busy year dealing with planning matters, and general enquiries from my residents as well as attending Parish Council Meetings.

We are now holding Full Council, Planning and Overview and Scrutiny meetings face to face, all of which are decision making meetings, following the easing of the covid rules, but have continued our training session and all other meetings etc via zoom.

Boundary review plans are underway to reduce the number of Councillors from 38 to 31, as part of a boundary review for the district. The new wards will consist of 1, 2 and 3 member wards, It has been proposed to make the Martley Ward much larger, which would be known as Martley and Team valley, taking in parishes from Alrick in the South right up to Abberley in the north, approx. 16 miles long and 9 parish council groupings, I have submitted my comments to the Boundaries Commission as Martley Parish Council have also done, my main concerns are that my experience of being a ward member for 27 years, is that the close contact between the ward member, residents and parish councils are very important, it would however be difficult to attend all 9 Parish Councils as dates will clash..

The final decision on ward boundaries is due to be published this summer, with elections taking place next May, (2023).

The end of the municipal year at Malvern has seen the resignation of the Leader of the Council to “allow it to take a new direction”.

If such a change would allow the Council to address certain issues were performance needs improvement, that would be welcome.

What is needed is improvement in the Council’s performance with planning. The Council’s own residents’ survey shows increasing dissatisfaction with the performance of the planning department.

Even more importantly, in the past year the SWDPR timetable has slipped by at least a further year (totalling two years delay in two years - suggesting no progress over that time) with a far greater risk of speculative development in our villages due to a question surrounding the five-year land supply following a

Planning Inspector's decision, this means that developers will try to have developments agreed under the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF), rather than the local plan. The NPPF has a presumption in favour of development, and leaves rural locations exposed.

Concerning finances, the Council continues to spend large amounts of its reserves without scrutiny from the general membership or assessment of relative effectiveness. At the same time substantial sums are being spent in Malvern, overlooking the fact that much of our District is a substantial distance away. The almost £200,000 purchase of land at Hallow (to which I oppose) largely in the flood plain that no-one else seemed to want remains in the same state it was two years ago, although it was bought for the purposes of carbon reduction, I agree with carbon reduction, I felt that organizations such as the NFU have pledged to reduce it to net zero by 2040. and felt the money could be better spent elsewhere within the district.

Ukraine Support Staff continue to work hard to deliver the Homes for Ukraine scheme in Malvern Hills. As of 28 April, we have been made aware of 75 hosts in the district, with an anticipated 198 guests, although we are learning that some guests are choosing not to travel after their visa has been issued for a variety of reasons, so we are treating this figure with caution.

To date, staff have carried out a total of 36 property checks – all satisfactory – with a further 9 booked. Additional capacity has been committed by the Communities team to assist with these checks. Working with the CAB, we have also welcomed 10 guests to the district so far to collect their £200 payment and inform us of any welfare or support needs. We know that more have arrived, and they are being booked in for their welcome.

The main priorities we are picking up from initial welcome conversations are access to healthcare and particularly mental health / trauma support, school placements and support with financial matters, including bank accounts, benefits and right to work,

Obviously, this is one of the biggest humanitarian issues we have possibly experienced since WW1. I thank our residence for the help they are giving to the Ukraine's, whether by donating money, aid or finding families' refuge...

I have enjoyed a close working relationship with my Parish Councils and County Council and will continue to do so.

Best wishes,
Barbara

