

Annual Parish Council Chairman's Report 2022

My annual report last year was given at a time when the parish was still in a national lockdown. Since then, our local organisations have resumed their meetings, the playing field is used for football and cricket, and the memorial hall is once again a busy place. The Parish Council has been busy as well. We have done our best to improve the appearance of our village, develop new facilities for our sports teams, and ensure greater safety on the roads. We have also advised the District Council on local planning applications. I will deal with each of these in turn.

Every gardener knows that you only keep places tidy by constant attention. It's the same with a village. On behalf of the Parish Council, Councillor Mervyn Hardwell convened Martley Taskforce, which has developed a village maintenance plan. A survey on social media identified work needed, which was then carried out by volunteers. Local agencies were contacted to request improvements to their property, and a schedule of routine tasks was agreed with the village Lengthsman. A new wildflower meadow is in preparation.

Maintaining the appearance of the village is made difficult because of vandalism and littering. There has recently been damage to the burial ground pavilion, and we are considering installing CCTV. There is a constant problem of littering along roadsides, and the Parish Council holds an annual litter-pick in early Spring. This year's event was organised with great competence by Councillor Mandy Gardner, and we have agreed to hold a repeat event this Autumn.

We should all be pleased that we have active and expanding sports teams in Martley for men, women and children. This means we need better changing rooms and club facilities. The Parish Council has therefore looked at how best to upgrade the Mike Ganderton Pavilion and also provide a new clubhouse in a corner of the playing field. Councillor Stuart Watt has chaired a multi-agency working party which has drawn up plans. These have been submitted to the District Council planners for pre-application advice. If this is positive, we will organise a public meeting to explain the proposals and assess support.

A petition by Councillor Charlotte Davis showed that many parents were concerned about the safety of their children when walking to and from school. Road safety is a particular problem in Martley because there are two schools opposite each other, and many children live too far away to travel on foot. Councillor Peter Weddell-Hall has prepared a road safety strategy for the Parish Council, and we have held a series of meetings with the County Highways Department, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the two local schools. This has led to some positive changes, but cash is needed to improve access to the Chantry site and to build a new footpath along the East side of Church Lane. We have drawn up outline plans for this footpath and contacted the District Council to see if planning approval is needed.

Martley is an attractive place to live, with an active community and two good schools, all in a lovely rural setting. This has inevitably led to pressure to build new houses in the village. Our neighbourhood plan allows development only within the settlement boundary. The Parish Council advised the District Council to reject two applications during the last 12

months which fell outside this boundary. One of these applications, at Sandyfields (West of the Hopyards), was rejected by the District Council. As yet, there has been no decision on the other application, for 82 houses South of the playing field. One other important planning application was for the Crown site. We advised against approval of an application early in 2021 on multiple grounds. A much-improved application was submitted at the end of the year, and we recommended acceptance subject to some conditions. The application was finally accepted this month with these conditions included.

The planning system is complex and legalistic, and it takes time and effort to understand it and respond effectively. The Parish Council is therefore setting up a training programme called 'Martley Planning Team'. This will also advise on updating our neighbourhood plan. This will help us ensure that any new housing is in small clusters rather than large estates, has a local character, meets the most urgent local housing needs, and minimises vehicle usage.

A committee of parish councillors has helped organise the programme of activities for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and secured Lottery funding to pay for it. This should be the start of an active year for the village. Some of our local organisations have been adversely affected by the lockdowns, and I recommend we hold a recruitment fair to publicise each organisation.

I am very proud to be chair of an effective and hard-working parish council, in which every member plays an active part in developing and implementing policy. We are lucky in Martley for the commitment shown by our district and county councillors for their attendance at our meetings and the enormous support they have given to the work of the Parish Council. I would particularly like to thank our Vice-Chairman Gary Wroe, and Michelle Alexander for her excellent advice as Parish Clerk and Burial Ground Manager.

Stuart Cumella
10 May 2022