

Martley Parish Council: Chairman's Annual Report 2023

Earlier this month, the Parish Council was re-elected without opposition. I would like to think this represents the confidence the community has in its representatives, although I suspect that it may reflect a lack of people willing to take on the onerous but stimulating job of being a parish councillor.

What has stimulated us this past year? Well, as usual, we have benefited from the sound management of Council business and accounts by our Parish Clerk, who also manages the burial ground. Our finances are healthy and within budget, and we have about £75,000 in the bank. However, this sum includes various grants and payments which are ring-fenced for designated purposes.

We have used these assets in several ways:

- ▶ In the first place, we have done our best to improve the appearance of the village and maintain the playing field, play area and burial ground. This has been greatly helped by the team managing the Village Improvement Plan, by the work of the Martley Taskforce and by the litter-pick, which is now twice/year. It is particularly encouraging to see new wildflower planting (which is also the case with the Millennium Green). The Crown remains the one great eyesore in the village. The District Council approved a planning application for redevelopment of the pub last year but attached some conditions before work could begin. These have yet to be met.
- ▶ Secondly, we have worked to improve public safety. There have been cases of theft, vandalism and fly-tipping, and we hope that the new Neighbourhood Watch will help reduce these offences. One thing we can do to improve safety is on the roads. Over the last year, we have met with the two schools to discuss improvements to traffic flows, and the County Highways Department to improve the signage along Church Lane. Many people have told us of their concern about the safety of pedestrians along Church Lane, and we taken steps to purchase land to enable us to build a new footpath. We are also re-instituting Speed Watch. One other important area of public safety is the installation of defibrillators, and there are now three of these in the Parish. We are arranging training in their use.
- ▶ Thirdly, the Parish Council has worked with the Cricket Club to develop a new pavilion in a corner of the playing field. This will be an important sporting and social asset, and will be provided at no cost to the community because of the Club's success at fund-raising. We have agreed a contract for the use of the playing field which has been signed by the Cricket Club. Unfortunately, we do not have an active football club, and I very much hope this lack can be remedied in the near future.
- ▶ Fourthly, We have advised the District Council on planning applications. Martley is under great pressure from developers, and we have two applications pending for large housing developments, at Sandyfields and in the field South of the playing field. Decisions on both applications are expected soon. If they do proceed, they

would have a major and largely unwelcome effect on the village. However, it is important that the Parish Council intervene as much as possible to ensure any developments meet the highest standards. This is because developers have a history of making unfulfilled promises. I have checked the original planning application for the Hopyards, which promised that it should by now be full of mature trees, including an apple orchard on the South West of the development.

- ▶ Finally, this has been a year of memory and celebration. A team including several parish councillors organised the excellent platinum jubilee and coronation events. Smaller events, but equally enjoyable, are the monthly film shows organised by Pat Owen, who deserves our thanks as a truly worthwhile member of our community. Another worthwhile member of the community was John Nicklin, who died recently. John would usually be here, telling us of his work with Path-or-Nones, the Geology Society and the Webmesh. Our community will greatly miss his enthusiasm and hard work, and I propose we consider how we can best remember him.

Stuart Cumella
15 May 2023