

Mistley Parish Council Chairman's Annual Report 2021

The last twelve months has sadly been dominated by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic which has impacted life throughout the United Kingdom since March 2020, when the first of the three national lockdowns that we have had to endure to date began, and when life as we knew it changed immeasurably.

As a result of the measures taken to endeavour to control the spread of the virus, the Parish Council had to change many of its working practices. The most significant of these was to switch from our usual physical meetings in the Village Hall to virtual meetings held by Zoom. The pandemic also resulted in the cancellation of last year's Annual Parishioner's Meeting, so this is the first such meeting we have been able to hold since April 2019. Meeting virtually rather than in the more familiar surroundings of the Village Hall has presented challenges to us all and I would like to thank all our Parish and District councillors, our Parish Clerk and also the public for the flexibility and forbearance everyone has shown since we were last able to meet physically in the Village Hall in March 2020.

While the Covid-19 virus has had an impact on the way we have had to work over the year, it has not stopped the work of the Parish Council. We may have been impacted by the need to adjust working methods to ensure the safety of our councillors and colleagues, but in the main we have managed to continue to look after our village, and I would like to highlight some of the successes we have had together over the last 12 months.

During lockdowns our green and open spaces have been more important than ever to our parishioners. While the use of our playgrounds and sporting groups that use Furze Hill and the Welcome Home Field had to be curtailed for extended periods, we are delighted that rugby, football, bowls and cricket have now recommenced and our open spaces are put to excellent use housing all four sports. Last year we were disappointed to have to cancel our planned inaugural bowls match against the Bowls Club, but we look forward to this year's match on Saturday 29th May.

Wider in the community we have been grateful for the efforts of our Footpath Warden, Mr Keith Garwood and our tree wardens – initially Mr Bob Horlock and latterly Councillor Paul Nutter. We also remain grateful to the work of our village handy man and warden, Mr Brian (or Sam) Forrester, who worked tirelessly to repaint our playground equipment and redecorate the loo at Furze Hill during the draconian days of the first lockdown, and since then has kept the loo clean and

open for use, and opened and closed the car park gate daily, along with his other work around the village.

Our new Brunswick allotments were allocated at the start of this year, replacing the old allotments previously on the site of Brunswick Gardens. We have been delighted to see new and existing allotment holders looking after their plots with such enthusiasm. As always we are extremely grateful to the chairman of MALGA, Mr Michael Appleton, but particularly so this year, for all his additional work in preparing the new allotments for new tenants.

At Furze Hill the fencing around the car park has been replaced, along with new signage making the rules for dogs and their owners clearer. At the car park the charity bins have been removed and the bottle banks re-sited. We have also responded to issues of anti-social behaviour in the car park by putting a gate at its entrance to restrict access during the evenings and at night. Signage has been completed at the site of the gate making it clear for all to understand when the car park is open and closed.

Recently over 100 trees have been planted in the village and there are plans to plant several hundred more. We also planted a silver birch sapling at the Welcome Home Field in a joint event with Manningtree Town Council. The sapling was a gift from Her Majesty the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy Initiative and it was our pleasure to convey our thanks to Her Majesty in a letter along with photographs of the event.

The Parish Council laid wreaths at our war memorial at the 75th anniversary of VE Day in May, and at a scaled down Remembrance Sunday event, in November. We also managed to hold a village litter pick in October using new equipment which was purchased thanks to a grant procured by Susan, our Parish Clerk, for which we are very grateful.

A substantial refurbishment of the Village Hall is under way, details of which will I am sure conveyed by the Chairman of the VHMC in her report.

We have also embarked on a project to swap our old streetlights for modern and efficient LEDs, as and when the old ones develop faults, in order to carry out the project in as cost-efficient a manner as possible.

In the Community Richard and Bob Horlock spearheaded a project to dig out the remains of the old World War II Nissan army huts at Furze Hill, which have attracted much interest and attention. They also led a project to expose the former Gamekeeper's Cottage and the trout pond, and recently, the bridge at the abandoned Walton train line. We are also grateful for their work on the ongoing

project to resite the old milestone at the Swan Basin, along with a replica milestone marking the distance to local towns.

In October the Parish Council organised a drawing competition for the children of Mistley Norman Primary School, in which the children drew landmarks of Mistley. We received over 60 entrants from children of all ages attending our school and were delighted to award prizes to some excellent artists.

While it is fair to say the Parish Council has been frustrated by planning consents achieved by developers which has led to housebuilding continuing apace in our village, we welcome the news that the first stage of the Local Plan has been adopted by the District Council. The Parish Council's planning committee, chaired by Jamie Cambridge, takes its responsibilities to opine on planning applications seriously, and to that end we have arranged an open meeting for parishioners to discuss the planning application received by Tendring District Council in respect of Mistley Place Park on 11th May.

Sadly we lost two councillors in the past year; Beverley Burton and Chris Smith, but we have been joined by Mark Lawry and Derek Bell. We extend our sincere thanks to those departing the Parish Council and a warm welcome to our new joiners.

We are as always indebted to Susan Clements, our amazing parish clerk, for her continued professionalism, good humour and efficient support to us all. This year Susan has somehow found time in her busy day to prepare the Parish Council's application for Foundation Status, in the Local Council Award Scheme, run by the National Association of Local Councils. Such an award will provide our stakeholders and parishioners with the assurance of the high standards to which the Parish Council works. Susan has also carried out a project to catalogue and archive many of the Parish Council's documents, which are now stored in the Village Hall.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our District Councillors, Alan Coley, and Carlo and Val Guglielmi who work so hard for us and assist us so greatly in our work for the village. As Chairman I am also extremely grateful for the consistent support and wise counsel of my Vice Chairman, Jenny Chaplin.

It is customary for the Chairman of the Parish Council to announce in this report the recipient of its annual Chairman's Award and I am delighted that for 2021 the award goes to Frances McMillan, who has worked tirelessly as Mistley's Postmistress for the past 30 years. Sadly Frances will shortly be leaving us, and the Post Office and shop will close at the end of May. We would like to thank Frances for all she has done for Mistley and to wish her a long and happy

retirement. Jenny and I will formally present Frances with her trophy in the near future. We will also present last year's winner, Sharon Robinson, with her award.

As we look forward to the next 12 months we are optimistic that lockdown measures will continue to be slowly lifted as the vaccination programme continues, and that a return to normality is reasonably imminent. We are consulting with the National Association of Local Councils on a return to physical meetings at such a time when we can be sure it is safe to do so. In the meantime I would like to close by thanking all councillors once again for their professionalism and patience in the unprecedented circumstances in which we found ourselves working in the past 12 months, and for the dedicated way in which they have all continued to look after Mistle and the interests of all our parishioners.

Charlotte Howell

26th April 2021

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