

MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Report of the Council for 2012/13

1. Membership

At the AGM in May Martin Rayner was re-elected Chairman and Andrew Birch was elected Vice Chairman. During the year one of the 11 Councillors, Andrew Norman, resigned for personal reasons and was replaced by Charlotte Howell who was co-opted after the vacancy had been advertised.

Our District Councillor, Carlo Guglielmi, has attended most meetings and we are grateful for his help and advice. It is with regret that it has to be reported that our other District Councillor, and our County Councillor, Sarah Candy, has attended no meetings nor answered any correspondence.

During the year our Clerk, Richard Ling, retired after more than 22 years in that position and was replaced by Wendy Saint-James who is also the Clerk to Manningtree Town Council. Richard continues to assist the Council as Responsible Finance Officer.

2. Finance

The Council's precept for the year was £57000 which represents a Council tax of about £58 per Band D property. The precept for the coming year has been set at £59000 which represents an increase of just under 4%. This increase will allow us to continue our programme of maintenance and improvement to the services provided in the Parish.

At the beginning of the year the Council's reserves stood at £23,234 and, subject to the submission of final audited accounts, at the end of the year stood at £24,862. This reserve is made up of a Working Reserve of £5,595, a grant of £6000 from the Lottery Fund, a General Reserve of £10,023, a Cemetery Reserve of £2,979 and the Clerk's Superannuation fund of £265. These last two items are 'ring fenced' and cannot be used for any other purpose.

Total income during the year, excluding balances brought forward, was £113,393 and total expenditure £111,765.

The income for the year has been inflated by the receipt of the £6000 lottery grant and the actual reduction in usable reserves is largely a result of the former Clerk's superannuation fund being paid to him upon his retirement.

The accounts are subject to a quarterly audit by an Internal Auditor and a yearly audit by External Auditors.

3. Major Items of Expenditure

a. Police Community Support Officers

The Council, in co-operation with Manningtree and Lawford Councils, contribute 50% of the cost of two PCSOs. These Officers are dedicated to work only within the three parishes and, the Council consider, make a very good contribution to neighbourhood policing in the area. It is unfortunate that towards the end of the year one of the PCSOs resigned and has not yet been replaced. However the Council's contribution has been reduced accordingly. The cost during the year was £38283 of which £21010 was recovered from Manningtree and Lawford Councils with £5500 still to come.

b. Street Lighting

The Council owns and maintains 110 street lights within the parish. The cost of

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energy during the year was £3454 and the cost of repair and maintenance was £2,318.

c. Recreation Grounds and Open Spaces

The Council owns Furze Hill Recreation Ground which contains the Village Hall, car park, children's play area, three sports pitches and a large wood containing many ancient trees including 'Old Knobbly' an ancient oak. The area of the Recreation Ground is about 50 acres. The total cost of maintaining the Ground, excluding the Village Hall which is maintained by a Management Committee, was £10,555, which included £4,400 for grass cutting. Income received for the use of the sports pitches was £965. The Council employs a Warden to oversee the use of the Recreation Ground part of whose duties is to check the condition of the children's play equipment. Safety checks are also carried out at three monthly intervals by an independent Contractor and a major yearly check carried out by Tendring District Council.

With the aid of grants from the Lottery Fund, The Three Parishes Trust and the County Council plans are being made to construct a "Trim Trail" around the Recreation Ground during the coming year. The total cost of this will be approximately £12000 towards which the £6000 Lottery Grant, referred to under Finance, has just been received.

In addition to the Recreation Ground, the Council maintains three areas of common land and cuts highway verge grass on behalf of the County Council. The total cost of grass cutting was £2000. On this land we provide and maintain litter bins, public seats and public shelters the largest of which, at The Walls, is being re-furbished at an approximate cost of £900 plus materials for the subsequent painting.

d. Employment of the Clerk

Both the former and the present Clerk to the Council are employed under the terms and conditions of the National Agreement drawn up by the Society of Local Government Clerks and National Association of Local Councils. Their salary and expenses during the year amounted to £17990 which included a pension lump sum of £7,000 paid to the former Clerk on his retirement.

e. Administration

The cost of administration, including insurance, audit fees, stationery, training fees, hiring of premises etc. was £8,800. Included in this is a sum of £810 claimed by Councillors in training costs, allowances and expenses.

f. Grants and Subscriptions

In order to assist local organisations some major and minor grants were paid out during the year. Subscriptions to relevant Essex and National Organisations were also made. The following are details of the grants and subscription paid during the year:-

First Aid Responders	£300.00 grant
Council for the Protection of Rural Essex	£29.00 subscription
Essex Association of Local Councils	£481.00 subscription
Friends of Foundry Court	£50.00 grant
Young Musician of the Year	£75.00 grant
Open Space Society	£40.00 subscription
Friends of Historic Essex	£10.00 subscription
Manningtree Museum	£90.00 grant
Tendring Association of Local Councils	£15.00 subscription
Rural Community Council of Essex	£55.00 subscription
Royal British Legion	£60.00 grant
Mistley Church graveyard	£940.00 grant

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Citizens Advice Bureau	£500.00 grant
Community Bus	£200.00 grant
Essex Wildlife Trust	£40.00 subscription
English Heritage	£15.00 subscription
Essex Playing Fields Association	£25.00 subscription
Brantham Bonfire	£35.00 grant
East Anglian Children's Hospice	£100.00 grant
Mistley Autumn Days Club	£50.00 grant
Welcome Home Field	£550.00 grass cutting
Total	£3660.00

4. Other Facilities and Services Provided by the Council

Planning

Every planning application is forwarded to the Council for our comments. Major applications have been the redevelopment of the EDME site and redevelopment of the Secret Bunker site. Tendring District Council has consulted the Council in their preparation of the new Local Development Plan. The Plan considers the three parishes of Mistley, Manningtree and Lawford as one and envisages a 6% growth in housing stock over the next 10 years within the area. It would appear that most, if not all, of that growth will be within Lawford and we have no objection to that proposal.

Cemetery

In conjunction with Manningtree Town Council the Council owns and maintains a public cemetery situated next to St Mary's Churchyard. The Churchyard is close to becoming full of interments and the Cemetery provides a convenient alternative for the families of loved ones, not only in Mistley and Manningtree, but also for adjacent parishes. The fees received for the year amounted to £3,335 and expenses amounted to £1,376. Any excess of income over expenditure is being put into a reserve account to be used for a future extension.

Mistley Quay

The Council is supporting the efforts of Free The Quay to replace the inappropriate fence erected by the owners along the Quay by a more suitable barrier. Support is also being given to declare the Quay area a Village Green, open to all members of the public and also to declare the access from the west to be a public highway.

Village Hall

The Village Hall is owned by the Council but we have no say in the management, or maintenance of its interior, as it is leased to the Charity Commissioners and managed by a Management Committee whose work is appreciated by the Council. As an expression of this, improvements works costing almost £1800 were funded by the Council.

Unfortunately, as a result of what appears to have been an arson attack, the Hall suffered badly from fire and smoke damage during the year which cost about £80,000 to repair. With the exception of a small excess, all of this cost was recovered from our Insurers but it did involve the Council paying, and then reclaiming, the VAT on the work. This is the reason for both the income and the expenditure for the year being about £16,000 more than in previous years.

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Trees

The Council owns many trees on our land particularly at Furze Hill. Much work, costing £1400, has been carried out for safety and aesthetic purposes during the year. A woodland management plan is being developed by our Tree Warden which will ensure the health of the major trees and encourage bio-diversity.

Queen's Jubilee

We were pleased to join with Manningtree and Lawford to plan various events to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee in June. Our contribution was a grand beacon, bonfire and firework display on the Recreation Ground. This proved to be a very popular and enjoyable event and our thanks are due to the many people who worked hard to make it a success. Although we were not counting the cost we contributed £3000 almost half of which was refunded from income.

5. Swan Basin

The Swan Basin, situated in the High Street, was built in the 18th Century and is now listed as a structure of historic interest. The work to restore the flow of water through the swan's beak has now been completed and it is working satisfactorily.

6. Swans and Geese

The Council welcomes the swans, which are a large part of Mistley's heritage. However the Council continues to be concerned about the issue along The Walls where parts of the river bank have eroded enabling numbers of the picturesque herd to gain access to the greensward turning it in places to a grassless mess and to wander into the road putting themselves and motorists at risk. A Working Party, with valuable input from a representative of Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB, has met regularly over the last year which has resulted in a natural hedging barrier being planted with a gate (erected by members of the Stour Sailing Club) to access the river. This has in the main been successful in keeping the swans off the grass allowing the Greensward to regenerate and at the same time reducing the number of swans disrupting traffic along The Walls.

7. Affordable Housing

During the year a planning application for 15 affordable houses in Harwich Road was submitted by the English Rural Housing Association and approved by Tendring District Council. It is anticipated that construction will commence in 2013.

8. Allotments

The Council rents a number of plots of land to provide facilities for allotment holders. One of the plots has been the land off Harwich Road formerly the Brunswick House gardens which has been in private ownership since 1994. The tenure of this land is uncertain as the owners wish to bring forward plans to develop the land for housing and had given the Council notice to quit at the end of this year. The Council supports the use of the land for allotments and is resisting any plans to provide housing on the site. A Working Party has been set up with representatives of the Council and the local Allotment Holders Association to determine possible sites for long term allotment use and to establish a formal relationship between the Council and the Association.

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9. **Health and Safety**

A Health and Safety Policy is in place and is being adhered to by the Council during the year.

10. **Access to Information**

All agendas and minutes are available from the Clerk or via the Council's website. Copies of all non- confidential correspondence and accounts are also available from the Clerk.

Martin Rayner - Chair of the Council
Andy Birch – Vice Chair of the Council
Richard Ling – Responsible Finance Officer
Wendy Saint-James - Clerk to the Council

2nd April 2013