

# MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

## Annual Report of the Council for 2013-2014

### 1. Membership

At the AGM in May, Martin Rayner was re-elected Chairman and Andrew Birch was elected Vice-Chairman. Our District Councillor and also our County Councillor, Carlo Guglielmi, has attended most meetings and we are grateful for his help and advice. In June, our Clerk, Wendy Saint-James decided to resign and was replaced by Andrew Lee. Richard Ling continues to assist the Council as the Responsible Finance Officer.

### 2. Finance

The Council's precept for the year was £59,000 which represents a Council Tax of about £58 per Band D property. The precept for the coming year has also been set at £59,000. This 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 £24,862 and, subject to the submission of final audited accounts, at the end of the year stood at £25,861. This reserve is made up of a Working Reserve of £11,603, a General Reserve of £10,028, a Cemetery Reserve of £3,480 and the Clerk's Superannuation fund of £749. 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 £101,745 and total expenditure £100,746.

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 to the match-funding of 50% of the cost of two PCSOs. The cost during the year was £33,728 of which £20,053 was recovered from Manningtree and Lawford Councils, with a further £5,400 to come in the first quarter of this year. In December 2013, Essex Police announced that it was intending to end match-funding of PCSOs as from April 2014. As a consequence, there were three options: (1) to fully-fund one PCSO; or (2) to increase the precept and fully-fund two PCSOs; or (3) not to fund any PCSOs. The Chairman discussed the options with the Chairman of Lawford Parish Council and the Mayor of Manningtree Town Council, who were both reluctant to increase their precepts. Following a discussion at the Parish Council meeting on 16 December, it was agreed unanimously to withdraw from funding PCSOs and that the remainder of the PCSO contribution should be retained for other projects. The Chairman indicated that Tendring District Council might have a future proposal about Community Wardens.

#### (b) Street Lighting

The Council owns and maintains 106 street lights within the parish. The cost of energy during the year was £3,460 and the cost of repair and maintenance was £5,010. While the street lights owned by Essex County Council are being turned off between

# MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

midnight and five o'clock in the morning, all of the street lights owned by the Parish Council continue to stay on.

(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 £6,400, which included £2,400 for grass cutting. Income received for the use of the sports pitches was £900. 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.

Last year with the aid of grants from the Lottery Fund, The Three Parishes Trust and Essex County Council, a "Trim Trail" was constructed around the Recreation Ground with the assistance of a Community Payback Team. The cost of this was approximately £10,500.

In addition to the Recreation Ground, the Council maintains three areas of common land and cuts highway verge grass on behalf of Essex County Council. The total cost of grass cutting was £3,000. On this land, we provide and maintain litter bins, public seats and public shelters the largest of which, at The Walls, was refurbished last year and recently repainted as part of a project undertaken by a Prince's Trust Team.

(d) Employment of the Clerk

Both the former Clerk (Mrs Wendy Saint-James from October 2012 until June 2013) and the present Clerk to the Council (from June 2013) 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 £9,600. A further £2,400 was incurred on other staff costs.

(e) Administration

The cost of administration, including insurance, audit fees, stationery, training fees, hiring of premises etc. was £6,886. Included in this is a sum of £522 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 subscriptions paid during the year:

First Aid Responders	£300 grant
Council for the Protection of Rural Essex	£20 subscription
Essex Association of Local Councils	£500 subscription
Friends of Foundry Court	£50 grant
Young Musician of the Year	£75 grant

# MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Open Space Society	£55 subscription
Friends of Historic Essex	£10 subscription
Manningtree Museum	£150 grants
Tendring Association of Local Councils	£15 subscription
Rural Community Council of Essex	£55 subscription
Royal British Legion	£150 grants
Air Ambulance	£200 grant
Mistley Church graveyard	£990 grant
Citizens Advice Bureau	£500 grant
Community Bus	£200 grant
Essex Wildlife Trust	£40 subscription
English Heritage	£15 subscription
Essex Playing Fields Association	£25 subscription
Brantham Bonfire	£50 grant
East Anglian Children's Hospice	£300 grants
Mistley Autumn Days Club	£50 grant
Free the Quay	£500 grant
Welcome Home Field	£550 grass cutting
Manifest Theatre	£500 grant
Youth Community Award	£164 grant
Grand Theatre of Lemmings	£100 grant
River Stour Trust	£100 grant
<b>Total</b>	<b>£5,664</b>

## 4. **Other Facilities and Services Provided by the Council**

### **Planning**

Every planning application is forwarded to the Council for our comments. A major application has been the development of land South West of Horsley Cross Roundabout Clacton Road Horsley Cross to provide a new industrial park with up to 28,280 square metres of floor space, a bus depot and 30-metre high telecommunications mast which will enable broadband services to the Tendring district. Tendring District Council has consulted the Council in their preparation of the new Local Development Plan, which will additionally include the development of land north of Stourview Close to ensure a better spread of new housing within the development area. 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.

### **Cemetery**

The Council jointly with Manningtree Town Council owns and maintains a public cemetery situated next to St Mary's Burial Ground. The Burial Ground is close to becoming full and the Cemetery provides a convenient alternative for the interment of deceased parishioners, not only in Mistley and Manningtree, but also of those from adjacent parishes. The fees received for the year amounted to £2,970 and expenses amounted to £2,380. Any excess of income over expenditure is being put into a reserve account to be used for a future extension.

### **Mistley Quay**

The Council continued supporting the efforts of Free the Quay to replace the

# MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

inappropriate fence erected by the owners along the quay by a more suitable barrier. The Planning Inspector appointed by Essex County Council to consider and report on the Application for the Registration of Mistley Quay as a Village Green completed an inquiry and delivered a report to Essex County Council in November 2013. The report recommended that the part of Mistley Quay for which the Application was made (other than those parts of the Quay that are highways) should be registered as a Village Green under Section 15 of the Commons Act 2006. The Inspector's recommendations still need to be considered by Essex County Council's Development and Regulation Committee, before Essex County Council formally approves the recommendations.

## **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 and managed by a Management Committee whose work is appreciated by the Council. As an expression of this, improvements works costing almost £1,400 were funded by the Council. There was damage to the roof of the Village Hall as a result of the storm in late-October 2013. In addition, there was damage to the rear door of the Village Hall in early-November, which might have been an attempted break-in. With the exception of a small excess, all the cost of repairs was recovered from our insurers but it did involve the Council paying, and then reclaiming, the VAT on the work.

## **Trees**

The Council owns many trees on our land particularly at Furze Hill. Between October 2013 and February 2014, a number of trees were damaged by storms. The Harwich Mayflower Project has expressed interest in the timber from the fallen oak trees blown down on Furze Hill. Much work will need to be carried out for safety and aesthetic purposes during the next 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.

## 5. **Swan Basin**

The Swan Basin, situated in the High Street, was built in the Eighteenth Century and is now listed as a structure of historic interest. The work to repair and renovate Swan Basin was completed in March.

## 6. **The Walls**

The Council welcomes the swans, which are a large part of Mistley's heritage. The natural hedging barrier planted a year ago has helped in keeping many swans off the grass to enable the greensward to regenerate. However, speeding along The Walls is a problem which is raised regularly by residents and Councillors in the Public Voice section at meetings of the Council. In 2012, there were about 300 swans in Mistley, but the number has been going down rapidly with 60 gone in just 12 months. In 2013, 20 swans were killed along The Walls, the cause of which has been attributed to vehicles speeding during the early-morning by drivers who are not taking notice of the 30MPH speed limit. During winter months there are often fresh-water puddles on the road, which attracts the swans. They also come onto the greensward next to the road because they need some grass in their diet. Swans are very slow and deliberate when crossing the road and are vulnerable to being hit by vehicles speeding. Within a period of two weeks in January 2014, six swans were killed. At the Council meeting

# MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

held on 27 January 2014, following a discussion of the problem, Councillors proposed three possible traffic-calming measures: (1) a section of rumble strips located by each of the wildfowl road traffic signs to remind drivers to slow down; (2) road traffic signs (perhaps solar-powered) which could flash warnings to drivers to keep to 30MPH if they were speeding; and (3) 30MPH roundel markings on the road periodically. A request for speed reduction measures along The Walls were forwarded to County Councillor Guglielmi for consideration by the Local Highways Panel.

7. **Affordable Housing**

English Rural Housing Association's planning application to construct 15 affordable houses in Harwich Road was approved by Tendring District Council. The first phase of constructing eight houses commenced in March 2014.

8. **Allotments**

The Council rents a number of plots of land to provide facilities for allotment holders. Unfortunately allotment tenants had to vacate the Brunswick House Allotments site following receipt of a notice to quit by the landowners. The Brunswick House Allotments site 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 by 4 December 2013. The Council had sought the option of buying the allotment land at the agricultural rate but the landlord was not willing to a sale. The Council supports the use of the land for allotments and shall resist any plans to provide housing on the site. The Council has submitted an application to nominate the land as an Asset of Community Value, which is being considered by Tendring District Council. Meanwhile, the Council is seeking to negotiate the lease of a two-and-a-half-acre plot of land for new allotments off Harwich Road and backing onto Rigby Avenue. The English Rural Housing Association has agreed to allow access through their development of the land near Harwich Road. The new allotments will include an area for parking.

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 – Chairman of the Council  
Andrew Birch – Vice-Chairman of the Council  
Richard Ling – Responsible Finance Officer  
Andrew Lee – Clerk to the Council

April 2014