

MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Report of the Parish Council for 2014-2015

1. Membership

At the Parish Council's Annual General Meeting in May, Martin Rayner was re-elected Chairman and Andrew Birch was elected Vice-Chairman. Carlo Guglielmi one of our District Councillors and also our County Councillor, has attended most meetings and provides updates on the business of both the District and County Councils. Following the premature death of our second District Councillor Sarah Candy in April 2014, Lawford Parish Council Chairman, Alan Coley won the subsequent by-election and has attended meetings as the second District Councillor. We are grateful to both Carlo and Alan for their help and advice. Andrew Lee and Richard Ling continue to assist the Council respectively as the Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer.

2. Finance

The Council's precept for the year was £59,000, including a grant of £4,567 from Tendring District Council, which represents a Council Tax of £58.45 per Band D property. The precept for the coming year has also been set at £59,000, including a grant of £4,110, which represents a Council Tax of £58.91 per Band D property. 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 £25,860 and, subject to the submission of final audited accounts, at the end of the year stood at £33,947. This reserve is made up of a Working Reserve of £19,139, a General Reserve of £10,033, a Cemetery Reserve of £3,482 and the Clerk's Superannuation fund of £1,293. 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 £224,173 and total expenditure £190,226.

The accounts are subject to a quarterly audit by an Internal Auditor and a yearly audit by External Auditors. Miss Valerie Pretty has agreed to undertake the role of Internal Auditor for the Parish Council from June 2015.

3. Major Items of Expenditure

(a) Police Community Support Officers

Since the joint decision by the local Councils not to fully fund PCSO presence following the withdrawal of match-funding by Essex Police, in this Financial Year only the arrears for the funding of PCSOs were paid.

(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 £4,933. While most of the street lights owned by Essex County Council are being turned off between 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

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including 'Old Knobbly' an ancient oak. The total cost of maintaining the Ground, excluding the Village Hall which is maintained by a Management Committee, was £3,851, which included £2,123 for grass cutting. Income received for the use of the sports pitches was £990. 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.

In addition to the Recreation Ground, the Council maintains three areas of common land (The Walls, The Green, Green at Mistley Heath) and cuts highway verge grass on behalf of Essex County Council. The total cost of grass cutting was £2,274. On this land, we provide and maintain litter bins, public seats and public shelters the largest of which, at The Walls.

(d) Employment of the Clerk and the Responsible Finance Officer

The Clerk and the Responsible Finance Officer are employed (respectively: 15 and 3 hours a week) 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 salaries and expenses, including Income Tax and National Insurance, during the year amounted to respectively: £9,896 and £2,000. A further £2,251 was incurred on other staff costs.

(e) Administration

The cost of administration, including insurance, audit fees, stationery, training fees, hiring of premises etc. was £7,245. Included in this is a sum of £455 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	£36 subscription
Essex Association of Local Councils	£507 subscription
Friends of Foundry Court	£50 grant
Young Musician of the Year	£75 grant
Open Space Society	£45 subscription
Friends of Historic Essex	£10 subscription
Manningtree Museum	£50 grant
Tendring Association of Local Councils	£15 subscription
Campaign to Protect Rural England	£36 subscription
Royal British Legion	£50 grant
Essex Air Ambulance	£300 grant
Mistley Church graveyard	£1,100 grants
Citizens Advice Bureau	£750 grant
Community Bus	£200 grant
Essex Wildlife Trust	£40 subscription
English Heritage Trust	£15 subscription
Essex Playing Fields Association	£30 subscription
Brantham Fireworks	£50 grant
East Anglian Children's Hospice	£120 grant
Mistley Autumn Days Club	£50 grant

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Welcome Home Field	£550 grass cutting
Youth Community Award	£78 grant
Mistley Baby and Toddler Group	£120 grant
Suffolk Accident Rescue Service	£200 grant
Total	£4,777

4. Other Facilities and Services Provided by the Council

Planning

Every planning application is forwarded to the Council for our comments. 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. A new version of the Local Plan was necessary because of objections received and also Tendring District Council's lack of consultation and co-operation with Colchester Borough Council and Babergh District Council over disputes near borders concerning shortage of land and the effect on facilities. The new Local Plan will be required to deliver 12,120 new houses (which include 655 in Lawford, Manningtree and Mistley) and 5,000 jobs between 2014 and 2031. If the new Local Plan is not approved by the Inspectorate then there would be an imposed Local Plan. In May 2014, Tendring District Council set up a Local Plan Committee and Councillors have attended as observers and have spoken in the Public Voice session about the need to keep green wedges between villages. The Committee has agreed a new timetable, which includes: an initial public consultation following the General Election in May 2015; a final public consultation in autumn 2015; an examination by the Inspector in spring 2016; and adoption in the summer of the same year.

Cemetery

The Council jointly with Manningtree Town Council owns and maintains a public cemetery situated next to St Mary's Burial Ground. 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 £4,889 and expenses amounted to £1,180. Any excess of income over expenditure is being put into a reserve account to be used for a future extension.

Mistley Quay

The registration of Mistley Quay as a Village Green by Essex County Council was approved in July 2014, following the recommendations of the Planning Inspector which were the result of an eight-day public inquiry in June and July 2013, was welcomed by the Free the Quay, the local community and the Council. Consideration of the recommendations have been delayed further by extensive representations by TWL, the owner of Mistley Quay, subsequent to the Inquiry. All the issues raised after the Inquiry by TWL were rejected by the Planning Inspector. TWL has since brought judicial review proceedings to have the decision reviewed in the High Court. The process consists of several stages and the parties involved are TWL and Essex County Council. While the judicial review proceedings are in progress, no steps can be taken to remove the fence.

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. A major project to extend and refurbish the

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Village Hall was undertaken in the past year. The project costs (including the architect's fees, project management, contract document management and construction) were estimated at approximately £112,500. Funding of the project was derived as follows: Mistley Malting Trust made a grant of £50,000; the Catalyst Trust made a grant of £30,000 to the Kids Club and Essex County Council made a grant of £15,000 from the Community Initiatives Fund; the Council agreed to make provision in the 2014-15 budget for up to £9,330, while the Mistley Village Hall Management Committee agreed to make a contribution of £8,000, making a total of £112,330. The work included: construction of a new lobby; additional storage area; a wet room; a public lavatory; installation of a new boiler and additional radiators; energy efficiency measures (such as double-glazing and loft insulation); new doors; new ramps and handrails. The budget has been exceeded by about 1% or £1,500. In addition, while contractors were on site the opportunity was taken to tidy up the area to the rear of the football club changing rooms. Work began in September 2014 and was completed in March 2015. The Chairman acted as Project Manager, while the Responsible Finance Officer was responsible for finance matters to ensure compliance with the Council's Financial Regulations. Representatives of the benefactors, users of the Village Hall together with guests and Councillors attended the official opening ceremony on 18 March 2015. Arrangements for the opening and cleaning of the external Public Toilet are being finalised with TDC.

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 accepted the Council's offer to remove some of the timber from the fallen oak trees blown down on Furze Hill. During 2014, remedial work continued for safety and aesthetic purposes. Extensive bramble-clearing was undertaken at Furze Hill with the support of the Payback Team, assisted by the supervision of our Tree Warden and Phil Chatfield, which has opened up the paths through the woodland. One of Mistley's ancient oaks, 'Old Knobbly' was nominated for entry in the Woodland Trust's England Tree of the Year competition, although disappointingly polled second place with a respectable 15% of the votes cast.

All The Fun At The Furze

The Council together with Lawford Parish Council and Manningtree Town Council organised a successful day-long event at Furze Hill on Saturday 14 June 2014 for local residents of the three parishes. This included day-time activities, a mixture of stalls and bouncy castles. A modest charge for a wristband allowed children to use equipment for up to four hours. During the evening a variety of local bands played and there was also a licensed bar operating from Mistley Village Hall. The event closed with a brilliant firework display. Local businesses: Edme Limited, generously contributed a grant towards the event and also provided a truck for the stage; while Rose Builders kindly loaned fencing and a generator. The free parking at Mistley railway station and also a bus to and from Manningtree railway station, helped to reduce the impact on traffic. The three Councils have agreed to hold a similar event every two years.

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 Council is responsible for its maintenance.

6. **The Walls**

Speeding along The Walls is still a concern which is raised regularly by residents and Councillors. The Council is still awaiting a decision to proposals for speed reduction measures along The Walls, which it submitted to the Local Highways Panel.

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7. **Affordable Housing**

English Rural Housing Association's planning application to construct 15 affordable houses off Harwich Road was approved by Tendring District Council. The first phase of constructing four houses and four apartments was completed in March 2015 and they are now occupied.

8. **Allotments**

The Council currently rents land off Harwich Road to provide facilities for allotment holders. In February 2014, the Council submitted an application to nominate the land on which used to be the Brunswick House Allotments site, as an Asset of Community Value, which was formally approved by Tendring District Council in January 2015 and added to the Register. The Council has sought 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 had agreed to allow access through their development of the land near Harwich Road. The Council had sought and obtained planning permission for vehicular access to the site and had also set aside funds for: developing access; water supply; gates and fencing; hard standing; and hedges. Quotations had been sought for setting up the site. However, access to the site would not be possible until early-April 2015, when the first phase of the affordable housing had been completed. Disappointingly, the Council has not been able to settle terms with the landowners and sign an agreement, because the lease is on hold while the landowners revisit their options for the site. Other options will continue to be considered.

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 online 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 2015