

MELBURY OSMOND PARISH COUNCIL - CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2020

This report is written as we begin to come out of an extended lockdown period due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a virus unknown to us at this time last year. Although the impact in the South-West generally is perhaps less than in other areas of the country it nonetheless has affected all our lives in some form or another.

With this in mind I am sure we stand with all of our professional carers both locally and nationally to thank them publicly for their continued efforts in providing care and support during this time. In addition, as a small rural community, we thank those in Melbury Osmond who have and are continuing to provide help and support, from collecting and distributing shopping and prescriptions to checking in on neighbours and generally keeping in contact. We owe each and every one a debt of gratitude.

During this year your Parish Council has met regularly every two months until March when Parish Council meetings and public meetings in general were suspended. However, there was one exception to this in September 2019 when available Councillors did meet at the Reading Room with the Clerk in attendance but unfortunately due to extenuating circumstances the meeting was not quorate. So, as is appropriate, no official minutes were taken or decisions made albeit notes were made and are available.

We are particularly pleased this year to welcome Richard Paley, as a co-opted Councillor. His appointment in March this year was unanimously agreed and we look forward to his input over the coming years.

The Parish Council therefore currently consists of Roger Caesley, Pete Coverdale, Martin Smith, Richard Paley and myself supported by our Parish Clerk, Jodie Carter.

We would also like to thank our County Councillor, Mary Penfold, for her continued support in regularly attending our Parish Meetings and keeping us informed of the many changes at County level.

Minutes and notes for meetings are available for review on the Melbury Osmond website.

In addition to the regular Public Meetings all Councillors have taken on extra duties. From ensuring compliance with ever changing legislation, reviewing insurances, commenting on planning applications, looking after the playground and where appropriate providing support to our local organisations such as the Village Hall, Tennis Club and Artsreach.

The Parish Council continues to maintain a good working relationship with Ilchester Estates and we endeavour to represent the Parish in a positive manner whilst also raising issues and concerns as they become apparent.

The annual playground inspection was carried out by RoSPA during May last year which indicated that major work would be required over the next few years. A further inspection has just been completed (May 2020) and the Parish Council is reviewing the report prior to allocating the necessary funding. Many thanks to Pete Coverdale for organising this and being involved practically in carrying out routine maintenance. Please let Pete know if you would like to lend a hand in keeping the Playground tidy!

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Our thanks go to Anna Roxburgh, our Home Watch co-ordinator, who continues to keep us informed of Police notifications and has also been instrumental in utilizing the email data base to help keep us informed of those willing volunteers during the Covid-19 lockdown period. We also thank Barbara Harris our Footpaths Officer and Lindsay Reeve who maintains the Village Website.

With footpaths in mind, following the closure of the path from Fuzzy Ground to Higher Holt some years ago, it was considered by the Parish Council at the time that this was unacceptable and to support the efforts of Cllr Caesley, in a private capacity, to have the path added to the definitive map. The application was rejected by Dorset County Council. However, following an appeal to the Secretary of State in 2019 it was confirmed in February this year that the inspector had found in favour of Mr Caesley and that the path should be added to the definitive map. Signs will be placed within the next few months confirming this.

Parish Council finances are currently sound with a number of projected expenses not being fully realised due, in part, to Covid-19. Allowances were made in the budget for Election expenses however, as these were not in the end required this amount has been now ring-fenced and carried forward. Further allowances were also made for the Playground which was partially expended for routine maintenance with the remainder, subject to Council agreement, carried forward for further works. An allowance was also made for the VE Day Commemoration, which has been held over and a proportion for projected works to the entrance of the Recreation Field with costs, in part, to be shared with the Village Hall.

Whilst expected outgoings are fully reviewed annually, prior to submission to Dorset Council, financial pressures continue as routine maintenance formally dealt with at district level gets passed down to the local Parish Council and then inevitably on to local residents through the Precept. The scale of this devolved responsibility is difficult to quantify which is a frustration for many Parish Councils, including Melbury Osmond, when trying to predict expenditure sometimes up to 18 months ahead. As residents ourselves councillors are all too mindful of keeping the balance right and we will make necessary adjustments as necessary.

The total income for 2019/2020 was £6500, which is almost exclusively from the Precept. Our annual expenditure over this period was £4345 with our bank balance for year-end standing at £4110. The latter equates to £1956 carried forward from the previous year, £900 ring fenced for future election expenses leaving an underspend of approximately £1250 due to the non-expenditure of foreseen outgoings during Q1 and Q2. Audited accounts will be made public in due course and will be available on the website.

Paul Wells – May/June 2020