# Melbury Osmond Parish Council - Chairmans Report 2024

The second full year of performing this role has undoubtedly been easier in many respects as we understand the ropes much better, but reduced numbers and other commitments continue to impact our ability to deliver as much as we might like.

The Parish council currently consists of Peter Coverdale, Martin Smith, Robert Ward and myself. Katrin Holtham did not volunteer for re-election as she found it difficult to commit the time required. I convey my thanks for the support she offered whilst in post. We therefore currently have three vacant positions for councillors and would very much benefit from additional support and we are still hoping to recruit permanently to the clerk and financial officer role. Anyone interested in these positions, or with suggestions for suitable candidates for approach, please contact any member of the council. My thanks to Councillor Robert Ward, who continues working with me as temporary clerk and responsible financial officer until we resolve this.

I take the opportunity to formally express our sincere thanks to Mary Penfold, our county councillor, now retired, who regularly attended our meetings, provided updates and always offered to help address any issues with the local services, including the roads and the Post Office. We welcome our new County Councillor, Chris Kippax, and look forward to working with him.

Mentioning the Post Office I also wish to thank Roger Caesley for his stirling efforts to support the reinstatement of an outreach post office service, now mobile and visiting the village hall car park every Wednesday afternoon.

Meeting agendas and minutes are published on the village website, the maintenance for which we are very grateful to Lindsay Reeve, and for her continued management of the defibrillator unit at the Village Hall entrance. I also wish to thank John Haytor for his interest in the website and support to Lindsay with ideas and material to refresh it. Thanks also go to Anna Roxburgh for helping keep residents aware and safe via the Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

The council maintains the village playground. David Woolacott is retained to undertake weeding and maintenance and we very much want to express our gratitude to David Wheeler who continues to mow grass around the Hall and playground, in his own time, unpaid. We are working towards revamping the playground as it ages over time. The slide and tower have recently been replaced at a cost of £6399. Further work is likely required to future proof the playground surface whilst economically maintaining a safe environment.

The council continues to support the Village Hall and I would like to express our thanks to the largely new committee chaired by Wendy Wheeler who with considerable work make this cornerstone amenity in the village a thriving community hub. The parish council recently purchased a replacement picnic table for the Village Hall and further similar purchases are intended in the coming years.

The council continues to use the Village Hall rather than the Reading Room for meetings, leaving the latter somewhat unused. Despite all of Robert Wards efforts addressing the issue of high electricity bills with our supplier, annual charges remain in the region of £800 per calendar year and a discussion on the value of this and future use of the reading room are tabled for later in the meeting. We encourage opinions and any suggestions from the village for potential alternative uses. Any potential change of use will of course require consent from the landlord, Ilchester Estates.

Plans for creating a more permanent celebration for the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, and the King’s Coronation by planting a copse and restoring the pond at the western end of the rec remain but the working parties and community planting event was delayed again until late summer and autumn of this year.

There were seven planning applications in the period. Councillors reported several footpath and highways issues to the relevant authorities. Dorset Council Highways though not willing to undertake a formal site visit usually respond to pothole reports relatively quickly, so residents are encouraged to also report issues using the relevant DC online system - a link for which can be found on the village website. The safety rails on the footbridges at both the watersplash and the ford on pig lane have been replaced or repaired. We continue to petition for work on the two remaining footbridges in the parish that are out of action and work to restore the finger post sign at the diary junction now rests in our hands.

The council seeks to liaise and maintain a good working relationship with Ilchester Estates and Velcourt, addressing issues, where possible, as they arise. We look forward to working with the new dairy and estates managers as they settle into their roles going forward.

Parish Council finances are currently sound. Income for 23/24 was £6,800 solely from the precept; expenditure over the period was £4,721, and the balance to year end March 2024 was £8,833. After recent completion of the slide tower payments this currently stands at £6963 for the year ahead. Reduced expenditure on clerk’s salary remains a feature meaning we have been able to support village hall and playground projects whilst retaining the precept at below inflationary levels. Audited accounts will be published in due course.

Richard Paley, June 2024