

Chairman's Report 2022

For the last two years my Chairman's Report has been rather longer and more detailed than in previous years as I couldn't present it at a Parish Council in person due to the covid lockdown provisions.

This year I hope that more people will come to the meeting and hear my report and ask questions. For those that may not appreciate it everybody is very welcome to any Parish Council meeting and hear what we do. Although there are rules about speaking at a meeting, we would always attempt to provide an opportunity for residents to have their say and we would love to hear their comments.

During the covid lockdown we held meetings by Zoom but we returned to face-to-face meetings at the Village Hall in July 2021. Although villagers were welcome to join our Zoom meetings very few did. Zoom was a lifesaver and allowed the Parish Council to conduct its business (what would we have done without it) it was much more satisfactory when we were allowed to return to meeting in person.

Future Mole Valley

Mole Valley finally sent their regulation 19 draft of the proposed new Local Plan (Future Mole Valley) to the Secretary of State on 14th February, 2022. Two inspectors (Ms R Barrett BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI IHBC and Beverley Wilders BA (Hons) PgDurt MRTPI) have been appointed to examine the document and they have submitted their initial questions to MVDC at the beginning of April 2022. MVDC responded to these questions on 29th April, 2022. We anticipate that there will be several hearings by the inspectors during the next few months.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

The Neighbourhood Development Plan that had originally been started in 2013 has been re-registered and several meetings have taken place over the last few months including a Village Meeting held on 15th March. At that meeting we made a presentation to 45 residents on the planned approach to writing the NDP and we had a discussion where various questions raised by the audience were answered. We have appointed a consultant and have now completed a Character Appraisal and conducted a Survey. The results of the survey are currently being studied and we anticipate that further Village Meetings will be held later in the summer and in the autumn once we have written some of the sections of the NDP. We are following the the emerging Local Plan in many respects but will bring forward some additional policies relating to future development of Ockley parish.

Current Development proposals

We are aware of three major development proposals in the village. Two of these have had plans submitted to MVDC, namely

(a) Land south of Coles Lane

This proposal is for 60 houses on land opposite Ockley station. The original planning application was rejected by MVDC and the developer re-submitted some adjusted plans which were also rejected. The planning application has now gone to appeal but as far as we know no date for the appeal has been set. The site is not included in the emerging Local Plan.

(b) Land behind Prideaux Gardens

This second project is for 23 houses on land behind Prideaux Gardens. The site is included in the emerging Local Plan and the planning application has been published but as yet has not been determined by MVDC.

(c) Elderslie

The third development of which we are aware is the potential development behind Elderslie. We believe that plans are advanced but at this stage the proposal has not been published by MVDC. We understand that the plan is for a site 50 houses but this has not been included in the new Local Plan.

The Parish Council is aware of a wide range of views as to whether new housing is required in Ockley. Our general view is that a modest number of new houses, particularly affordable/social housing would inject new life into the village and we would also support some new infrastructure that would benefit the village as a whole. However, we are not supportive of large-scale development which we believe is not in the spirit of the emerging Local Plan where Ockley has been designated under the approach of “modest extension of rural villages”.

Ockley School Buildings

It is now 5 years since the school closed in 2017 and have since remained unused. We have had discussions with the Diocese and a team are currently looking at the possibility of converting the buildings into a Community Hub to work alongside the Village Hall and the cricket pavilion. It is unlikely that this will come to fruition in the short term as there are some legal hurdles to cross and funding to arrange but we believe that it could provide a very valuable asset that could help to attract young families to the village in conjunction with the new houses that will be built.

Speed on A29

This on-going problem has plagued the village for some years. Although it is said that the 30mph limit helps to reduce speed it is sometimes very difficult to believe it in the early morning when traffic comes through Ockley at high speeds or at weekends when motorbikes roar through even faster. One resident has been writing to Sir Paul Beresford on the subject but as yet there doesn't appear to be much action.

We are however indebted to the speedwatch team who carry out speeding checks on a frequent and regular basis. During the year the Parish Council purchased a second camera to help the team provide an even better service. The service did not

operate during the covid lockdown period but since it re-started and up to 1st March, 2022 a total of 1167 vehicles had been recorded exceeding the 30mph speed limit with the fastest recorded at 61 mph.

On a slightly different note we were also concerned with the speed of traffic on the Heathfield Cottage bend by Village Greens. A car coming from Ockley has a restricted view of the road by the shop entrance and if customers are crossing the road at the time there is a significant risk of an accident. SCC are to install some additional signage on the corner.

Footpaths

During the year we started on the plan to improve the footpaths by installing 2 kissing gates and two smaller gates to replace stiles that were in a poor state of repair. These replacements were largely made possible by grant funding through our County Councillor Helyn Clack.

We hope to continue this work gradually over the next few years. However we do have to find who owns the land and persuade them to pay for a new kissing gate (at around £600) but the two that have been replaced have been welcomed by many in the village

Changes in Boundaries

Currently two proposals are being considered by the authorities.

- (a) A potential extension of the Surrey Hills AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) – it is unlikely that this will have direct effect on Ockley although the “area of search” being considered by Natural England for the extension does include the AGLV (Area of Great Landscape Value) area to the west of the A29.
- (b) A change in the ward boundaries in Mole Valley. This is of a rather more significant concern as it directly concerns our representation on the council at Mole Valley. The proposal is that our current ward of Okewood Hill will be replaced by a much larger and extended ward running from Ockley in the south up to Great Bookham in the north. The proposal is to reduce the current 21 wards in Mole Valley to 13 and to provide for 3 councillors per ward making a total of 39 councillors instead of the 41 that currently represent Mole Valley residents. We shall debate this matter later today so we can submit our views by 6th June.

Other matters

A number of other less significant matters have exercised the Parish Council over the last year I have listed them (in no particular order) here with just a short comment on each.

- (a) Benches on the Green. Many of the benches are in a poor state of repair. We have asked the Cricket Club to assess whether they wish to organize repair or disposal.
- (b) Gatwick. We had a visit from GACC (campaigning against Gatwick expansion) in November. Their message was “Gatwick is big enough” and they encouraged us to support their campaign. The Parish Council later donated the sum of £ 250 (including subscription) to the GACC funds.
- (c) Social matters – support during covid. During the pandemic the Parish Council participated in a local scheme to help support vulnerable people.
- (d) Future Community Conference (Surrey Development Forum) – I attended a meeting in Guildford at the end of November. The purpose of the conference was to explore how all sides can work together to create a vision and plan for what the future of Surrey will look like in 2050. Since then I have tried to explore how MVDC will initiate discussions with residents, resident groups and parish council to provide input into this proposal.
- (e) Closure of Abinger school – We noted with disappointment that yet another local infant school was being closed. The main reason is stated to be lack of demand but the number of children in the area remains much the same as for many years.
- (f) Playground – the annual playground inspection was carried out on 4th November 2021 and several minor issues that needed attention were identified. Overall the risks at the playground were considered as minor and works have now been identified and action is being taken to correct the minor faults
- (g) Camping at Vann Farm – Concern was expressed last summer at the pop-up camp site at Vann Farm. It was subsequently understood that the facility was operating for a restricted number of nights during the season and the site had been inspected by the local council.
- (h) Post office service – although the service at the pavilion did not operate during part of the year it later started again and residents have been encouraged to use the service otherwise it might be closed permanently.

Parish Council personnel

During the year two of our Councillors – Simon Figg and Lucy Hogarth – retired for various reasons. We are sorry to see them depart and thank them both very much for their work over the years. We were very pleased to welcome Zoe Ward as a Councillor towards the end of last year. We are still one short of our quota of 7 Councillors and would welcome anyone who would like to serve on the Council.

Lesley Fletcher, who has been our clerk for many years, has decided to retire at the end of June. I have no idea how we will manage without her as she has kept us on the straight and narrow for a long time. We shall be advertising for a new clerk very shortly.

Finally

We would love to see more villagers at our meetings. I'm afraid we cannot provide the same level of entertainment as Jackie Weaver and the Handforth Parish Council but it is your village and many of the issues that we cover are important for the future of the village such as development, planning applications and speed on the A29.