

## Chairman's Report

Little did I think that when I wrote my Chairman's Report last year not long after the beginning of the lockdown, I would again be writing my report for 2021 under similar circumstances – although, of course, we all hope we might be approaching the end of the pandemic restrictions and be free to resume the important work of the parish council in more normal circumstances.

As last year my report is perhaps a little longer than might otherwise be the case if I could meet you face-to-face, explain what we had been doing and answer questions from the floor.

During the year we have continued to hold parish council meetings by zoom and report to you by way of publishing minutes on the website ([www.ockley-parishcouncil.co.uk](http://www.ockley-parishcouncil.co.uk)) interspersed with notices published on our facebook page.

Villagers have always been welcome to join us in these meetings but there has been little take up of this offer. I hope that you find these "publications" useful – but if not then we are always happy to receive your suggestions.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow councillors and, in particular, our clerk Lesley Fletcher. Without her help and guidance we would flounder in the myriad of notifications, reports, proceedings and all the other paraphernalia of local government.

## Ockley development

Although the pandemic has had a dramatic effect on efforts to action village development, it remains one of the most important subjects on our agenda.

This time last year Mole Valley had just completed the public consultation of their Future Mole Valley (FMV) plan for the next 15 years or so. During summer 2020 it became apparent that with the covid restrictions and with changing government policy the original timetable was unrealistic with the result that the next stage has been delayed until summer 2021 when the revised plan (called the "Regulation 19" draft) will be published. We expect that there will be some changes to the proposed sites in the village and that the public will be given the opportunity to comment on the revised draft.

We had hoped that by now we would have been well down the road on our Neighbourhood Development Plan. However with the pandemic and the delays to FMV we have been advised to wait until the summer before we restart the process. We will be asking the village to complete a new survey at that stage as all these delays have resulted in our information being somewhat out of date.

Meanwhile the parish council has been actively involved in the plans for development of the site behind Prideaux Gardens and the village was invited to a presentation by the developers Village Foundations on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2020. We

had a number of very useful comments and queries from the floor and we have been following these up with the developers. Their plans have been submitted to Mole Valley and are currently being validated before being published.

In addition to this site there are a few other proposals in various stages of development and the parish council is monitoring these with particular reference to the need for affordable housing and infrastructure development.

Over the last year there have been 28 planning applications for development in Ockley and several more mainly in Abinger but close to Ockley. The parish council has reviewed each of these applications and, where deemed/thought necessary, has written to Mole Valley expressing support or otherwise. Of particular concern is the application regarding the proposed development in Coles Lane (MO/2020/0667) which was refused by MVDC in October 2020 but which has now gone to appeal (April 2021). The parish council will continue to fight this application during the appeal process.

### Speeding in the Village

For several months during the year the volume of traffic on the A29 was significantly lower than normal due to the lockdown restrictions. However the vehicles that were moving tended to go even faster than usual. The Neighbourhood Speed Watch Team were unable to operate for much of the time but we did see an increase in police presence, particularly the Casualty Reduction and Safer Neighbourhood teams who spent a week in early March 2021 targeting the southern part of Mole Valley. The result was that there were a large number of drivers exceeding the speed limit and several fines were issued for this and other offences. It appears that the police are becoming increasingly interested in certain motoring offences such as speeding, noisy motorbikes, mobile phone usage and this is to be welcomed.

As a parish council we have also made particular reference to speeding when considering the various potential developments with additional access points onto the A29. This may increase the potential for accidents with slow moving traffic manoeuvring on a road with a history of excessive speeding. The developers are discussing this issue with Highways (Surrey County Council) in developing their plans.

The parish council has also been concerned about the safety on the corner on Coles Lane by Village Greens shop. Vehicles tend to go round the corner far too fast and pedestrians crossing from the car park to the shop are vulnerable. The owners of Village Greens and the parish council are trying to persuade SCC to install better signage.

The parish council hopes that the reduction in the speed limit north of the village to Beare Green may help to reduce accidents at Henhurst corner.

### School Buildings

Despite it being 3 years since the school closed there are, as yet, no decisions on the future use of the school buildings. We understand that the Parochial Church Council of the parish of Capel and Ockley together with the trustees of the school have had some discussions with the Diocese and we are hopeful that, in due course, a use will be found that, at least in part, will be for the benefit of the village.

### Footpaths in Ockley

In the latter part of the autumn we embarked on a survey of the 11.5 miles of footpaths in Ockley. Initially we have concentrated on the condition of the stiles and found that 22 of the 50 stiles need some repair or replacement. Unfortunately the pandemic has meant that action has not been as swift as we would have liked but we are hopeful that we can make progress on some work during the spring and summer.

The influx of visitors during the pandemic has meant that signage needs improving so that they keep to the official footpaths. Unfortunately there have been a number of incidents where people have not kept to footpaths resulting in fences being cut down, livestock escaping and fly-tipping.

We are also considering defining some approved circular footpaths for visitors for their enjoyment and to keep trespassing to a minimum.

We have registered for the Surrey County Council "Our Fund" scheme that may be able to provide some funds to carry out work on the footpaths.

### Playground at Village Hall

In addition to receiving a "low-risk" report on safety for our annual inspection we have also replaced the toddler swings at the playground. Money received from MVDC in respect of the Community Infrastructure Levy (charged to developers) paid for around 50% of the cost of the swings.

### Covid and the pandemic

The parish council have been active in providing schemes to help anyone suffering from covid, self-isolating or unable to leave home to do their shopping or visit the surgery. Many thanks to all those who offered to help those who asked for assistance.

### Health and Wellbeing.

One of our number attended a workshop on well-being during the year where it was learned that those who do not embrace technology and middle-aged men were the most vulnerable groups of people, particularly during lockdown - they were the least likely to reach out for help. Loneliness since lockdown has increased as normal social groups are unable to meet up; many people still have issues re. technology/are

unable to use 'phones at home to seek help as they may be overheard. Young families are also vulnerable as they may be short of money. It was important that everyone kept an eye out for their neighbours during the current crisis - identifying those in need is the biggest hurdle. National organisations were struggling to help during the crisis. The parish council agreed to watch out for any signs of such problems and would seek advice as to whether we could instigate any helpful ideas to reduce any problems that came up.

At Christmas we organised a Reverse Advent Calendar event whereby a number of boxes of groceries and other household items were collected for distribution to those in need mostly in Ockley and the surrounding district. We intend to repeat this exercise for Christmas 2021 and we hope we get even more support from the village.

### St Margaret's Church, Ockley

Since the parish re-organisation in January 2018 and more particularly with the reduction in church services during lockdown there has been a marked decline in the income of St Margaret's Church. The parish should be aware that if there is no significant improvement in receipts there is a danger that regular services will cease at St Margaret's Church. Those of us that love the building have been making improvements to the building itself and it would be a great shame if we cannot reap the benefits of those improvements with a renewed interest in all that the church can offer.

### In closing

I have tried to summarise some of the major subjects that the parish council has discussed over the last 12 months. Numerous other topics arise and are efficiently dealt with by the Parish Clerk. I would thoroughly recommend reading the minutes of our meetings and other notices on the parish website and do look out for postings on our facebook page.

Shortly we shall be reverting to face-to-face meetings as all councils must return to holding physical meetings from 7 May. You will be most welcome to come along to our meetings and, if you do, you will be given an opportunity at a suitable juncture to raise a question or make a comment.

Dick Thomas  
Chairman of Ockley Parish Council