

Chairman's Report

For the first time in living memory we have had to cancel the Annual Assembly this year in view of the coronavirus pandemic and the “lockdown” instructions of the government. In the normal course of events the Chairman can give his report and then answer questions from the floor – now I have to try and provide a more comprehensive review hopefully covering the ground. So apologies for my rather long-winded report.

The other consequence of the pandemic is that there are a lot of loose ends where progress has been interrupted and delayed as indicated below.

Before coming to the substance of our activities I would like to remind you that we have set up a Facebook Page (as Ockley Parish Council) where you can read about the special arrangements that have been put in place to provide help for residents during the coronavirus lockdown. Thanks to Amanda Barclay and Jo Page in particular for setting this up and manning the hot-line. Please also remember that the Parish Council has a website at www.ockley-parishcouncil.co.uk, including a lot more information about the council and its role in the village.

Ockley development

The far reaching subject of development in Ockley and in particular the provision of affordable housing has probably been the most important topic exercising the Parish Council for some time and although there are no certain plans as I write this there has been a lots of activity on several fronts

Future Mole Valley. The new local plan is well under way and hopefully most of you will have followed progress and participated in the consultation that ended on 23rd March. At the Parish Council meeting on 2nd March we had a thorough debate amongst the village, parish council and a representative from Mole Valley. In general I think it is fair to say that most people are generally supportive of the plan with regard to the provision of affordable housing but are very critical of the lack of planning on infrastructure, particularly roads. We await the results of the consultation with great interest.

Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). The Parish Council has agreed to re-start the Plan and indeed would have now taken action were it not for the pandemic. The first stage will be to do a new survey to update the data from the last survey in 2012. We hope that you will all participate.

Community Led Housing (CLH). In parallel with the above we have taken some advice on how we might set up a CLH scheme and this will be developed as we progress with the NDP.

Current proposals – The Future Mole Valley Plan lists 4 sites for Ockley and we are aware that quite a lot of work has been undertaken by MVDC on the viability of these schemes. In one case we are aware of a developer who has produced an outline plan and has talked to MVDC but we are yet to hear of whether this will be considered acceptable. There may be other schemes that will come forward before the plan is

finalised. There is a good chance that these schemes will go a long way to satisfying the demand for affordable houses in the village.

School Buildings

A potentially related subject is the future of the school buildings and we have been trying to get some answer from the Diocese on their views on the future of these buildings. As most of you will know the village tried very hard to get approval for a Free School but this was rejected by the Department for Education on the grounds that there is, apparently, no demand for school places in southern Mole Valley. If the buildings are not going to be used for a school then we believe there is the potential for a Community Centre. As you may know we did try to have the buildings made the subject of an Asset of Community Value but this was rejected by Mole Valley District Council.

Speeding in the Village

This is a subject that has exercised the village for a long time and we constantly try to get some action taken. Two or three years ago we employed a consultant to come up with some ideas on how traffic could be slowed down but at two meetings held last year Surrey County Council expressed the view that these were not sufficiently developed to proceed without further study and, in any case, they did not have the resources to do this under current budget restrictions. Another meeting is due to be held once the pandemic allows and we will continue to press them to take some action.

In the meantime the Speedwatch team have been rejuvenated and have a comprehensive plan to improve the coverage although the current lockdown will no doubt delay the start.

It is also possible that if and when development takes place in the village that some significant changes to the road infrastructure will be needed to ensure safe access to the new homes. In our view the cost of improving the road infrastructure, in particular providing speed reducing measures, would fall to the developers of the respective sites

Village Post Office

Following the closure of the Post Office service at the pavilion the facility has now been transferred to the Party Shop on Stane Street. They won't be able to start operating until the shop has been repaired/rebuilt, internet is installed and training has been completed. In view of coronavirus it may take some time before the service becomes available. .

Playground at Village Hall

A number of repairs/improvements have been or will be made to the playground

- (a) The old broken fence panels have been removed
- (b) New timbers around the barked areas have been installed

- (c) New conifer peelings have been laid to top-up the “soft” areas under equipment
- (d) The annual inspection has been carried out by MV with only a couple of minor issues that have been dealt with
- (e) Replacement of the toddler swings will be carried out after the end of the lockdown.

Pay phone boxes

The Parish Council supported the proposal to remove the phone box between the Village Hall and the Inn on the Green but retain the box at Ockley Station. In the case of the phone at the station it was noted that this had only been used 31 times in the last year but that it did provide an important service, particularly to potentially stranded passengers at the station. We understand that the decision has been endorsed by MVDC.

Planning Applications

Generally the Parish Council has not had issue with planning applications and has supported MVDC’s decisions. There is however one decision that we have objected to and that is application MO/2019/1291 in respect of a field barn at Six Oaks field to the south of the village. (Note: Six Oaks Field is actually in Abinger Parish but is, of course, very close to Ockley) Whilst MVDC have approved this application, our view is that the decision had been made without due consideration of the facts and a previous Article 4 notice. This matter is currently in abeyance waiting for a meeting with Abinger Parish Council and MVDC delayed due to the lockdown.

Motorhome on School Lane

Many of you will have been aware that a motorhome has been parked and occupied over-night on School Lane many times over the last few months. Whilst we appreciate that the owner had good cause to find somewhere to park overnight this is not allowed under our licence for the car park which is on private land. We also did not want to allow continued use for over-night parking in case this encouraged others to do the same. We therefore installed signs indicating that over-night parking was not allowable (except with permission). Maybe it has worked as he hasn’t been seen for a while.

Future Projects

Health and Wellbeing – this is an area that Mole Valley is keen to promote across the district and we would be very happy to receive any ideas that villagers may have on things that we might be able to promote in Ockley. We have put a link on the Ockley Parish Council website and Facebook page to take you to the Surrey County Council/Mole Valley District Council website page on Residents’ Health and Wellbeing.

In closing

Apologies for the length of this report – I could go on for some time as the Parish Council has covered numerous other subjects. I would thoroughly recommend that

you read the minutes of the Parish Council meetings (held every 2 months) and that are uploaded to the website shortly thereafter. I would also remind you that you are very welcome to attend a Parish Council meeting and, if you do, you will be given an opportunity at a suitable juncture to raise a question or make a comment.

Finally I would like to express my thanks to my fellow councillors for their advice, participation and boundless energy and, in particular, to our clerk Lesley Fletcher without whom we would flounder in the myriad of notifications, reports, proceedings and all the other paraphernalia of local government.

Dick Thomas
Chairman of Ockley Parish Council