

## Parish Council Chairman's report – 2025

The past year saw another change in Parish Clerk – the previous Clerk was employed on a contract basis, and the Council felt that the right permanent employee would establish a better basis for the long term. We thank our previous Clerk for introducing much-needed improvements in some key areas, including banking and data storage security. Michelle has now been in post for 6 months and our operations are already much smoother and more effective. An interim Audit has been carried out, and we believe that we approach the year end in a much better operational position than in recent years. In particular, we have seen a sea-change in collaboration between Councillors and the Clerk and we are now working much more effectively and harmoniously than we have for some time. Financially, we are in a sound position and have reserves that conform to levels recommended by our trade association. The Parish Asset Register has been reviewed with updated values and these values reflected in our insurance arrangements. In addition, our internal controls and policies have all been reviewed and updated, and will shortly be published as part of our new website.

In addition, I'm pleased to report that we have arrived at a level of stability in Councillor representation over the past year; 4 Councillors have now been in post for at least a year, and they were joined during the year by Carol Baxter. Carol is a past Chair of the Parish Council from some years ago and we benefit from the experience that she brings. The increase in Councillor numbers to 5 has allowed us to establish a Personnel Committee, and this has been in place and working effectively for the past 8 months or so. We continue to have 2 Councillor vacancies and we have been actively trying to recruit from Inworth. However, the A12 redevelopment situation has created a good deal of 'churn' and uncertainty in Inworth and recruitment has not been possible to date. We hope that this uncertainty will be resolved soon, and we will continue our recruitment efforts. Once we are at full strength, we will consider whether it would be beneficial to establish the additional committees that were discussed some months ago but put on hold until additional resourcing allowed progress.

Staying with Inworth for a moment, the company that operates the solar farm was due to make an agreed payment to Inworth residents in 2024. The

payment didn't arrive, so our Parish Clerk chased them up on behalf of residents. Evidently, the company had been taken over and the payment records had been 'lost'. After much to-ing and fro-ing, the correct payments were made to residents, facilitated by the Parish Clerk and helped greatly by John and Mary Lindsay.....many thanks to them.

The Orchard Working Group have been doing a great job in running and developing the Orchard, organising activities and raising funds so as to minimise the cost to Parish Council funds. You'll be hearing more about this from Marie in a few minutes. Getting more Community use in the Orchard continues to be a key aim of the Parish Council, so that the villages get full value from money spent. We are always interested in new ideas.

The allotments too are working well with very high levels of tenancy and only the occasional plot surrender. Again, you will hear more about the allotments from Carol later.

The playground is a very well-used feature of the village and its location alongside the village hall adds value to the hall. We would like to add additional play equipment, but the size of the playground makes it impossible. Safety of the play equipment is our key priority and the equipment is inspected in line with statutory recommendations. Our thanks go to the village grass cutting team for keeping the playground neat and tidy – more from David Madgwick in a few minutes.

Turning to events during the past year, the Messing and Inworth Action Group (MIAG) closed down their operations shortly after the Planning Inspectorate announced their decision on the A12 redevelopment. Remaining funds were given to the Parish Council with a 2-year stipulation that it should be used to soften the impact of additional traffic on affected properties. We believed this to be in accordance with MIAG Articles of Association, and the funds were accepted on this basis. Once the 2-year period expires, the funds may be used at the discretion of the Parish Council. The Parish Council, of course, comply with these conditions.

Currently, we understand that the A12 rebuilding project is on hold pending the outcome of the Government's Spending Review.

Moving to Planning, Colchester City Council is in the process of revising the Local Plan to incorporate the increased building targets allocated by Central Government. At the Local Plan Review a few weeks ago, it became clear that Colchester Planning department had included a development of 25 houses off Kelvedon Road. Government targets mean that we must expect development in our villages, but inadequate public transport provision, the lack of village services and poor road access make only modest development in Messing appropriate. We are looking to arrive at a level of planned development that reflects these difficulties through dialogue with the Planning department.

Staying with Planning, the Tiptree Neighbourhood Plan provides for additional development behind the Maypole restaurant and a relief road running parallel with Oak Road. These plans overlap into our Parish, and we have been in discussion with them for some time on a minor realignment of Parish boundaries. However, it became clear at the Local Plan Review that Tiptree Parish Council now have more extensive development plans than those in the Neighbourhood Plan that call for a much greater change in the Parish boundary. We are discussing these plans with our City Councillor, Andrew Ellis.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone involved in organising and running activities in the villages and giving their time to make the villages run as well as they do. For such a small Parish, there is a wide range of things going on, from coffee mornings to the wine club.....from the Film Club to charity quizzes.....they all go towards making up an active, vibrant community.

And to my fellow Parish Councillors.....the time, effort, dedication that you spend in supporting the villages is greatly appreciated, and the support that you've given me personally....at times in difficult circumstances, has been invaluable. Thank you.