

Writing the annual report can be something of an emotional roller coaster ride – dread that there may be too many topics on which we have failed to deliver but hope that there is also something positive to celebrate.

So, the positives:

We started the year with only four councillors but happily have finished with a full complement of seven, thanks to Denise Drizen, John Wilson, and John Brace.

Knowing that our residents were facing an energy and cost of living crisis we did not increase our £12394 precept deciding to use some of our reserves if necessary.

We adopted a new “.gov” web site and switched all councillors email addresses to the same. We have started work on improving our social media presence. We have also trialled live streaming of our meetings to allow residents to zoom in if they wish.

We appointed a new booking clerk for the hall and have just set up automatic payments via Stripe which will reduce the workload for the clerk. Bookings for the hall continue to be strong with an annual footfall of 9700. We have just organised for the interior to be re decorated using the Community Payback scheme which means we only have to provide the paint.

We purchased a new defibrillator as the old one was no longer viable, and we extend our thanks to our small group of volunteers responsible for regularly checking the equipment.

Using grants from Cllr Siddall and Cllr. Courtauld as part funding we have been able to purchase a new SID which we hope will help to reduce speeding in the village.

We have been working to create the community garden in the front of the hall using two grants totalling £8700 from the Essex Community Fund and the governments levelling up fund, via BDC. We provided £600 of matched funding for this project.

We have headed up the Colne Valley Community Energy Project managing an ECC grant of £2500 and promoting the project throughout the district. An application for £42,000 to the UKSPF via BDC to install solar panels, a heat pump, electric cooker, and an EV charger at the village hall has been approved with the funds becoming available in the new financial year.

For 12 weeks we financed the Community Hub in the village hall which attracted up to fifty residents each time. Our thanks to the group of volunteers who gave their time to make this a great success.

By allowing free use of the village hall, we continued to support the bimonthly community café, which has proved to be an important meeting place for our residents and gives opportunities for the police and other service providers to attend.

We also allowed the Church free use of the hall for their Christingle and harvest celebrations.

On the Meadows we spent the last of an ECF grant fitting a kitchen in the pavilion. Our volunteers organised a well-attended midsummer party to celebrate. We financed the clearing of the heritage orchard with access paths to the trees which will now be part of the cutting schedule. We also financed volunteer's training for the inspection of play equipment.

We financed works to reduce the amount of surface water flowing down Bures Road. We are awaiting a quote to improve the drainage at the side of the hall, and we have just agreed for works to realign the canopy.

The not so positives!

We have been unable to resolve the problems with the destruction of the Green and the Colneford Hill pavement, despite numerous discussions.

We are still hoping for a solution to the problem of no pavement at Millfield.

ECC still state that they are holding the land at the rear of the hall for development and will not offer us a 25-year lease to manage the land.

We have still not received the tenure of the village hall via a Community Asset Transfer with ECC stating that the value of the hall is too high for a CAT.

We have discussed fifteen planning applications throughout the year trying hard to represent our residents' views. At times we have been frustrated by the decisions taken by both planning officers and planning inspectors.

Jane Taylor

Chairman

White Colne Parish Council