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Chair's Annual Report 2025/26

The last 12 months have been a busy time for St Martha Parish Council but, as always, it is privilege to support our residents in any way we can and we are grateful to our Clerk, Anne Tait, for all her hard work. The future holds challenges and opportunities with the transfer to the new unitary authority of West Surrey Council as we say goodbye to Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council in 2027. Until then your Borough and County Councillors will continue to represent you until 31 March 2027 and the Councillors recently elected to West Surrey Council will initially operate as a 'shadow authority'.

St Martha PC has also said its own goodbyes - to **John Peake** after 50 years of service to this Parish and **Maureen Osman** who has moved to Dorset. John's contribution to this community has been second to none and we were delighted that this was recognized by King Charles and Buckingham Palace in a much-deserved letter from the Palace. Maureen will be missed for her valued contribution, particularly with regards to Halfpenny Close and Blacksmith Lane.

We are now looking for 2 new Parish Councillors, so please consider supporting your community in this varied, interesting and constructive way. Do get in touch if you would like to learn more. We would love to hear from you.

Parish Council actions and ongoing projects:

- *After consulting with residents on road safety along the A248 between Lockner Farm and Roseacre Gardens, the Parish Council is still awaiting a long overdue meeting with Surrey Highways to progress the matter.*
- *Road safety at Chilworth Infant School and village speed limits are being considered by Surrey Highways, however the PC is aware of differing opinions on traffic calming and therefore has emphasised the importance of a meaningful Highways consultation with local residents.*
- *Like others, the PC continues to raise with Network Rail deep concerns relating to the safety upgrades at the Tangley Level Crossing and Chilworth Station and their impact on residents, pedestrians and road users.*
- *The PC organized a meeting between Surrey Fire and Rescue and local interested organizations after a very serious fire within the St Martha Parish boundary on Blackheath Common in August 2025. Discussions covered rescue outcomes, resilience, land management practices, fire prevention and cross party working. The latter was particularly valuable when another fire on the heath broke out recently.*
- *There is now a new directional sign to the Gunpowder Mills by Vera's Path.*
- *Improvements have been made to Footpath 469 off Blacksmith Lane.*
- ***The PC is organizing events marking 400 years of Chilworth Gunpowder Mills. Please see the Village Magazine for details.***

- *Concern at the lack of water in the Gunpowder Site has meant this matter has been raised with the Environment Agency, Albury Estate, Network Rail, GBC and some landowners.*
- *A completed Gunpowder Mills Dormouse Survey, in conjunction with the Surrey Dormouse Group, unfortunately found no dormice on the Site.*
- *There have been repairs to the bus shelter opposite Lockner Farm and a new notice board.*
- *The old defibrillator outside the Percy Arms Pub has been replaced.*
- *The Council is working with Network Rail and the South East Community Rail Partnership after contractors for NR inadvertently partly destroyed the historic yew memorial known as Jessie's Seat along the North Downs Line.*
- *2 Parish Councillors feature in a new Surrey National Landscape podcast, 'Rail to Ramble – exploring the Chilworth area'.*
- *There will be a new directional finger post by the Chilworth Station green, supplied by Surrey Hills National Landscape.*
- *The Council arranged for the Chilworth Station public payphone to be reinstalled.*
- *In conjunction with the Community Rail Partnership – the PC helped design a visitors' map for the Station area.*
- *There is a new volunteer to manage the Station planters – Calli Dracos.*
- *There is also a new Parish Tree Warden – Mark Dawkins.*
- *The PC has reviewed and commented on numerous planning applications.*
- *Members have also attended conferences, webinars and meetings (including monthly Shalford Community Council & North Downs Line Steering Group meetings).*

This year's annual Precept: The annual precept is a local tax levied to fund a Parish Council's services and operations. St Martha PC has tried to keep the precept low in recent years to support residents, and indeed reduced it a few years ago, but unfortunately it has had to increase it by 23.9% for 2026/27. This increase is due to increased operating and administrative costs, expected additional costs during transition to the West Surrey Unitary Authority, and increased costs to maintain parish assets. For a band D property this is an increase of £9.26 from 2025 to 2026 (£38.76 to £48.02).

Although this is a large increase, it is only an increase of 15.9% on the 2021/22 precept, or 3% per annum for each of the five years since 2021/22. The proportion of your Council Tax that goes to the Parish Council is only a very small percentage of the overall Council Tax bill; however, the Parish Council is still very aware of the need to spend your money wisely and the importance of best value for money.

Do continue to keep in touch if there are things you wish to share, raise, or suggest. You are most welcome to attend our monthly meetings. Also – please keep reading our updates in the Chilworth Magazine, our website for news and further information, or follow us on Instagram. The next scheduled meeting is on Thursday 25th June at 7 p.m. in Chilworth Infant School.

Patricia Allen

Councillors:

Patricia Allen (Chair)

Graham Brown (Vice-Chair)

Julia Tantram

Debbie Toynbee

Raymond Young

Clerk: Anne Tait - clerk@stmartha-pc.gov.uk