Dear Chairman and Members,

This is my annual report although I report to you on a regular basis at your Parish Council meetings during the year.

I have now nearly completed my 21st year as your MDHC Councillor for the Martley Ward.

I am pleased to say that I have had a very busy enjoyable year being Chairman of council for the civic year 2015/16

I have had yet another very busy year as your ward member for MHDC, partially with regard to planning issues, and general enquiries etc.

I was successfully re-elected last May, it was a success both in terms of procedure and the outcome! It was logistically the biggest election in the Council’s history with 167,000 votes cast over three elections- parliamentary, district and parish.

I am still on Sport Martley management committee, representing MHDC, Sport Martley continues to flourish,

I still represent MHDC on the Old Grammar School foundation.

I have a positive story to tell you about the success of MHDC, I will look at the business of the Council, but more importantly what we are doing for the local economy and the communities. I will outline some key challenges at the end.

Firstly, I will look at the successes in relation to the operation of the Council’s business.

The Government is keen that local government plays its part in rebalancing the economy and we are expected to continue to be very efficient and lean as an
organisation. That is a challenge we have accepted and have set in plan some key foundations to ensure we are sustainable. The most important of these is the Council’s first ever 5 year business plan which was approved by Council earlier this month an open and transparent way of medium term financial planning.

The previous Conservative administrations successfully delivered £3.3m of savings but because of revenue grant reducing very quickly year on year, we will need to find another £1.9m over the next 5 (or now four years). We aim to ensure we reach that target on time and without affecting our front line services.

Along side our finances it is worth noting that the Council’s satisfaction levels and value for money scores have gone up this year from the most recent surveys.

I just want to touch on the four key drivers in our business plan where we will need to close that £1.9m gap. We have already started on most of the actions we need to take.

- **EFFICIENCIES** – we have already made decisions with Wychavon to have joint management team which delivers £140,000 savings for us each year. We have just set up a joint legal service from 1st January this year which will also make £60K savings per annum and we have most recently agreed a joint housing service which will save £80K per annum.

  We are also looking at consolidating our offices into one building saving money and hopefully resulting in surplus buildings which we can sell or let to the market.

- **PARTNERSHIPS AND SERVICES** – our great success since last May has been to sign up Freedom leisure to run our leisure centres delivering over £250,000 savings to the Council each year.

- The biggest challenge we have in terms of services is a possible joint outsourcing of our waste collection and street scene services. We know the private sector is very efficient at delivering these services to the
benefit of our residents and we are waiting to see if we will have a proper business case, with Worcester City and Wychavon to have a joint contract. If we do, this is a very important and sizeable procurement.

- INVESTMENT AND GROWTH- we are seeing returns on our investment in Malvern Hills Science Park ( £25K per year)

- INCOME GENERATION – this area covers a wide span of services such as we are the first council in Worcestershire to roll out a commercial recycling service to businesses with more than 200 tonnes recycled so far – which creates an additional income of £33k per year.

Secondly, I can brief you on what we intend to do as an administration for our residents, businesses and visitors.

We have, and our thanks to Cllr David Chambers for steering this, now published our 5 year plan after approval by Council in February– which is our corporate strategy. We have three priorities -they are to build stronger and healthier communities, drive economic growth and prosperity and make the most of our superb environment.

There are 26 actions included in the plan to be completed over the next five years. Under building stronger and healthier communities, highlights include delivering more affordable homes and bringing a number of empty homes back into use to help tackle the national housing shortage in the district. There is also a target to encourage less active people to become involved in physical activity and to deliver at least ten sport and health related activities in rural areas every year.

On the economy, the plan includes targets to support at least 300 businesses to survive or grow through start-up and expansion schemes and to make land available to create more than 200 jobs at Malvern Hills Science Park by 2021. Creating at least 50 new apprenticeships a year to help young people find jobs and lobbying to secure funding for a new Carrington Bridge.

The final priority includes projects to invest up to £10million in new open space, play areas and playing pitches across the district, improving the
marketing of the district to visitors and creating an early flood warning system in the most at risk areas.

There are examples of some other successes that I want to speak briefly about. They are:

**Helping our local economy:**

- Working with key strategic employers – this includes Morgan, Three Counties and QinetiQ
- We are facilitating the relocation of ESP to Blackmore Park in a new environmentally sustainable building which opens up this important business park.
- Supported the promotion of the Malvern Festival of Innovation which this year attracted over 2500 people
- Launched a new graduate scheme offering businesses up to £1,000 to take on a post graduate student. Also provided funding to expand the Cyber Apprenticeship Development Scheme to six form pupils across the district

**For the community**

- Worked with the British Red Cross to stage a Refugee Resettlement Conference in Malvern, the first of its kind in the UK. We have, since then, of course, been part of a county wide decision on accepting up to 50 refugees across the county later this year – we had to await a government announcement before Christmas that is would fully fund this over 5 years.
- Invested £55,000 and helped secure another £435,000 into revamping Sling Lane playing pitches to give a new home to Newtown Sports Juniors FC to expand the game of football in the area and provision for young people
- Seen the first stages of a £1.8million investment in our leisure centres as a result of our new contract with Freedom Leisure. This includes a gym refurbishment and myride studio at the Splash as well as the creation of a new café area.

- Piloted an outdoor cinema screening in Priory Park as a result of consultation with young people. More than 300 people turned up and there will now be a series of screenings over the next year.

- Received a record number of entries for our Sports Awards with many going on to success at county level.

- Held a successful Parish conference – most popular topic is planning and Section 106s! we will do more of these conferences each year.

For a clean and green Malvern Hills

- Won seven gold awards in the annual Loo of the Year Awards for our public conveniences.

- New online service for reporting missed bins.

- Launched an online garden waste ordering service with more than 200 people signing up so far.

Challenges

There are a number of key challenges that the Council will face over the life of this administration. I will just outline a few to you tonight...

Business rates income – by 2020, our grant from government will have gone completely and we will be reliant on business rates retention to support our budget. We support this approach by government to create self funding Councils.
Nonetheless, there are some risks to us, such as appeals against business rates – many of you may know that we have had to pay out £1.2 million from our reserves this year following appeals by doctors surgeries. We couldn’t sustain this level of appeal again and not many Councils could!

New Homes Bonus – we know the Sec of Sate is reforming this at the moment and he is consulting on a future policy approach. We are keen to see how this works out as it will affect our business planning considerably.

Housing growth – we have finally adopted the SWDP after 9 years! All 3 Councils agreed it in February, but there is still a great demand for housing growth. Our challenge is to try and steer growth to where the plan wants it and to stress to government that now the plan is adopted there needs to be full weight on the plan.

Devolution – the government originally were focussed on cities and city regions for devolution. However, shire England is asking government to be considered as well and this will be an ongoing issue for us. A delegation from public services in Worcestershire will be seeing Lord Heseltine in April.

Council Tax – we are part of a very small ‘club’ of low taxing Councils – we are one of the lowest in the country and the second lowest in the county. All district Councils were given the option of effectively a £5 rise in Council tax this year (indeed the government had already factored in its calculations that we would do it) and we took that offer.

I could speak about many other challenges but there are many as you would expect. Despite these challenges we have a council that is ambitious and ready to face them.

Finally I would like to say how much I enjoy working with your parish council, Chairman and members alike, also my close working relationship with your County Councillor, Phil Grove.

Cllr Barbara Williams.