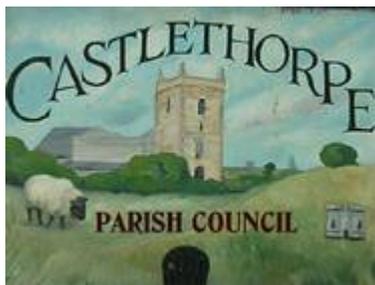


Chairman's Report to the Parish Meeting Held on 12th April 2010



Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting. I would stress that this is a Meeting for the Parish which has to be held by law at about this time of year. It is not a Parish Council Meeting though one will follow this Meeting.

The purpose of this Parish Meeting is for the Parish Council and other organisations to tell the village what they have been doing, what they are planning to do and to give the residents an opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions. Residents are entitled to put forward formal resolutions though none have been received.

If I move onto the Parish Council report, the Parish Council has two main types of activity; it looks after a small but important number of facilities directly and it works with MKC to make sure it delivers the services which the village needs.

It has been an extremely active 6 months since I last reported to the Parish in October and I am pleased to report on a large number of improvements which have been made to the village facilities through the efforts of your Parish Council and Clerk.

Work on the bulk of the refurbishment of the Village Hall was completed by the time I reported at the Parish Meeting held in October last year. Despite the bad weather, the new porch and entrance were completed for us by John Synott and Phil Homer and is now in use. The last piece of the improvement programme is the installation of a new gate at the bottom of the footpath and this should be done shortly. These improvements were made possible by a generous grant from WREN, a not-for-profit business which supports communities using funds from the landfill tax. I would also like to thank the Open Gardens Committee who have made a large donation through their fund-raising. The gate will be funded through our Ward Councillor's fund.

The second big parish council facility is the Sports Ground. I reported at our last meeting about the improvements made last year such as additional parking and the new path. The big news at this meeting is that we will tonight sign the cheque to buy our own grass-cutting equipment. We have assembled funding from an MKC grant, the Milton Keynes Community Foundation, Bucks Community Action and from the savings that the Parish Council will make itself from not having to pay a contractor. Our own mowers will mean that we can keep the Sports Ground in better condition for less money and it will be cheaper for the two sports clubs to buy any additional cuts they need.

The Sports Ground buildings are also being redecorated inside and out. We have a groundsman who will keep the Ground in a tidy condition and, finally, we are acquiring three new picnic tables for the Sports Ground.

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The Play Areas at the Fishponds and behind Bullington End Road are owned by the Parish Council but maintained by MK. The Parish Council has been pressing for improvements for about a year and has held meetings with the relevant MK Officers. We were promised that the fishponds would be levelled and re-seeded in the ball area and the football posts repainted this month. We are discussing with them what can be done to improve the equipment there as some items are in poor condition and near their end of life. In the meantime, the Parish Council has done some treatment for the moles and is pressuring Network Rail to make their fence rabbit proof. The Parish Council also put out a questionnaire in the last Castlethorpe News to seek residents' views on the play areas and this will be discussed by the Parish Council. I should say that I personally found it rather disappointing that there were only 16 responses from the village.

There was a very well supported meeting in January to review the Parish Plan one year on. There were a number of good suggestions and these have all been placed in a document on the village website. Our Parish Plan is regarded as an example of good practice and is, for example, illustrated in the parish planning section of the latest MK Planning Strategy document.

This leads onto the website which Peter Haynes and I primarily run with technical support from Gavin McDermott. The website has a wealth of village information from village events to important notices plus all the papers from public meetings, a diary showing what the parish council is doing and even a link to the local weather. The website is well used with up to 40 people a day signing on. It is well regarded outside the village and I have received a number of compliments from other parishes and other organisations seek to emulate it. Please use it, tell us if you think it could be improved and certainly tell us if you have an event coming up.

An associated organisation is the Rural West Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG). We have three parish councillors on the NAG plus two residents. The Parish Council supports the work of the NAG and PC Andy Perry will tell you about the work of the NAG later.

A lot of the parish council's time is spent working with MKC to get services for the village.

Public Transport is very important for rural communities. We have fought to get the bus service improved to an hourly service and to get a 6.30pm return service from the City, It is important that we use these services or they will be at risk – the use of the 6.30pm service is very low. Your parish council has engaged in a firm but constructive way with MKC. Not only have we won an improved service but you may have seen that Arriva are currently reducing services across MK. The 33 service is one of a very few that has been unaffected and I think it is because of the way we have interacted with MKC. We now want to get an improved Saturday service and through services to the hospital.

The state of our highways is important though again, through positive involvement with the MK Highways Officer, we have had a number of roads resurfaced. Obviously, potholes are a big problem everywhere at present and we have to table our potholes so that they will get priority. For your information, MKC normally has a budget of £900k pa. Using reserves, a government grant and an extra 1/2% on council tax, MKC will increase this to £2m this year.

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We had a site visit earlier this year to discuss highways issues. One idea that came from the officer was to produce a 'small area plan' around the Carrington and Village Hall to include a pedestrian crossing (for children as requested in the Parish Plan), more parking and opening up the green opposite the pub. Any plan will of course be very much subject to public consultation.

We have also requested improvements to the pavements especially where some are heavily cambered and dangerous when icy.

We have been requesting bus stop markings on North St for some time.

There is a consultancy study currently taking place to reduce the flooding at the Devils Dip.

Northants CC have said that they will do a study on the A508 junction in this financial year to evaluate improvements there which is a long standing issue for Hanslope and us.

There is a proposal, considered and supported by the Parish Council, to restrict movements of lorries over 7.5tonnes that do not originate or terminate in the village.

The Parish Council was the only parish in MK to opt out of proposed restrictions on verge and footway parking. We didn't want NCP coming round with tickets when the problem here is minimal and footway parking, so long as it isn't an obstruction, can even help traffic flow.

Parish Councillors, following on from the excellent report by the Ladies Group in the Parish Plan, have been walking and photographing the village footpaths and sending notes to the Footpaths Officer at MKC who will schedule remedial work.

The Parish Council has also requested resurfacing of a further stretch of the SUSTRANS cycle track. The worst stretch was properly surfaced at our request two years ago.

Peter Haynes has been personally tracking down arrangements for out of hours doctors services given the unsatisfactory situation whereby we were expected to travel to Daventry. Unfortunately, we can't use MK Hospital because the Hanslope surgery group is registered in Northants but the service will now be provided out of Northants Hospital which actually is about the same distance as MK from Castlethorpe.

The Parish Council and our Ward Councillor have taken a close interest in the Local Development Framework which determines among many other things, the amount of development that might take place. Castlethorpe is in the category of a small number of rural parishes where no residential development outside village envelope will take place unless requested by Parish Council and none is intended. We are also keeping a close watch on the Minerals Plan which could mean excavation along the Ouse and Tove given the extraction target imposed on MKC by central government and against which MKC are appealing.

The Parish Council participates actively in a number of external organisations for the benefit of the village. The Hanslope Park Area Forum was used to get the support of

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Hanslope and Haversham for improved bus services and will also be where we make representations about the Minerals Plan. The Parishes Assembly is where we fight to ensure that the rural parishes are not overlooked in favour of the big urban MK parishes. The Sustainable Transport meeting is concerned with developments in public transport as well as cycle tracks. The NAG is concerned with Community Safety as is the Responsible Authorities Group on which I sit as representative of the rural parishes. We sit on the Executive Committee of the Bucks Association of Local Councils and we are also active in the renegotiation of the new Parish Charter which governs the relationship between MKC and the parishes.

Most of this work is done for free as Councillors do not receive any remuneration nor has any claimed expenses. However, we have been obliged to make a small increase in our precept for 2010/11 of about £2 per household in the year i.e. 40p per week per house.

Overall, we think that a considerable amount of progress has been made for the good of the village and we hope for the continued support of residents.

Philip Ayles

Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council