

Chairman's Report 4th October 2010

Once again, the parish council has been very active with many achievements over the past six months.

Residents will recall that the parish council directly manages two main facilities; the Village Hall and the Sports Ground. It then uses its influence particularly with Milton Keynes Council but also through other groups to get other improvements to the village.

Village Hall

The refurbishment of the Village Hall was substantially completed before my last report in April but the side gate has since been erected. This was funded through our Ward Councillor's discretionary fund from MKC.

The parish council works closely with the Village Hall Committee and the new sign at the front is a great improvement. We should shortly have some new lighting along the footpath to the new entrance and we are planning to even the ground by the old entrance.

Sports Ground

At the Sports Ground, the new grass cutting equipment arrived. We have had a bit of a learning curve but our new groundsman, Paul Stone, with help from Scott Pearson, has been able to keep the ground cut for the various matches and the ground is generally in good and attractive condition.

The parish council has also had the woodwork on the Sports Ground buildings redecorated which was essential to prevent long term damage.

The area behind the football pavilion has also been cut back properly and wood chippings laid to suppress weeds. Many thanks to Luke Stacey and to the Parks Trust who provided the chippings.

Finally, the parish council has acquired three new large picnic tables which it has placed at the Sports Ground.

Play Areas

The next big project for the parish council was the improvement of the play areas starting with the fishponds. We did get MKC to level and re-seed the football area and we have engaged with them about a major refurbishment. This was to be done through a government 'Playbuilder' scheme. Castlethorpe was omitted from the first round of the scheme and your council put considerable pressure on MKC so that we were included.

We have a design for equipment, an MKC project manager, a small 'parish partnership grant' from MKC and we had applied to WREN (the Waste Recycling charity) for the final piece of funding. Unfortunately, in August, the government cancelled Playbuilder.

The parish council has decided to continue with the WREN application, which will not be decided until December, and then to see what funds we can assemble, including negotiating to bring planning gain from the Maltings forward, and do what we can in the play area with

Chairman's Report 4th October 2010

those funds. Along with government funding, many other sources of funding have also dried up but we will keep all of this under review.

Highways

The parish council has been particularly successful in engaging with MKC to maintain our highways to a high standard though there are several areas where we continue to press for improvements.

The parish council has also obtained a grant, which it will match, to erect a new 'heritage style' streetlight at the entrance to the village shop.

The parish council actively participates in the Hanslope Park Consultative Area Forum with the parishes of Hanslope and Haversham.

The Forum has been pressing for flood improvements at the 'Devils Dip'. A study was completed this summer which recommended the building of one or more dry ponds at Tathall End which will take excess water and release it in a more controlled way. This will also help with the flood problem in Tathall End along with clearing a blocker culvert there. MKC Highways has applied for capital for the ponds in 2011/12.

The A508 – Yardley Road Junction

This junction is regarded as dangerous by most residents in both Hanslope and Castlethorpe. We have been pressing for a definitive study so that we can get a costed design for widening the junction and putting in protective islands as on all neighbouring junctions on the A508.

The junction is in Northants and NCC did agree, after pressure from the parishes in the Hanslope Park Forum through MKC, to use some of the planning gain from the new Thrupp Wharf marina to fund the study.

The study has now been done and a design completed to widen the carriageway and build two islands to protect the turn right lane. Unfortunately, this has been costed at £300,000 which is not affordable and certain not in the present environment.

A meeting was held on Friday 30th September with the two MPs, Mark Lancaster and Andrea Leadsom, a representative from each of the four parish councils (Castlethorpe, Hanslope, Haversham and Cosgrove), our Ward Councillor, Andrew Geary, and officers from NCC and MKC. It was agreed that the officers would work together to produce a lower cost design which the MPs would then feel able to support with their respective authorities. Progress will be monitored through the Hanslope Park Area Forum to which Cosgrove will be invited.

Capital bids for 2011/12 were completed in July / August so the earliest realistic timescale for this work is now 2012/13 and this will be dependent on an affordable scheme.

The Carrington Arms

The Carrington Arms remains a matter of concern to residents. The parish council is not legally allowed to act on a private business though there is a group of residents, under the leadership of Barry Norris, who have met from time to time to discuss what options are

Chairman's Report 4th October 2010

available. I have assisted this group in a personal capacity. The group has mainly looked for grants from EU funds for rural businesses to ease the capital investment and make the business case for opening the pub viable. So far, this has drawn a blank but work continues.

However, Simon Hill, the owner, did write to our MP, Mark Lancaster, earlier in the year to clarify his position and repeated his intention to re-open the pub with a restaurant but that this would have to be when the economy had recovered sufficiently to make the pub a viable business. He has repeated this in recent conversations with Barry and Andrew Geary.

You will have seen some work being done and that an opening has been made in the wall by the Buff Room. This work is to discharge some of the building conditions which were part of the planning permission. Work will start on both the Buff Room conversion and the pub but a further decision will be made by Simon on when and how the pub will be re-opened.

Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG)

The Rural West NAG covers the three parishes of Castlethorpe, Hanslope and Haversham. Both parish councillors and residents sit on the NAG. Its purpose is to help reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of these. In fact, Castlethorpe is extremely fortunate and we typically only have just over an average of one incident a month and there have been none at all since May. This is a tenth of the average in Milton Keynes and even well below the average in the three villages of Rural West.

The three priorities identified by residents were speeding, inconsiderate parking and dog fouling.

The NAG has worked with other rural NAGs in Milton Keynes to acquire some equipment called Community Speed Watch which is a speed measuring device. Volunteers, under the supervision of a police member, will record any speeding vehicles and offenders will receive a warning letter though prosecutions cannot be made through Speed Watch. Repeating offenders or high speed areas may then trigger formal police action. Volunteers have to be formally trained and many thanks to Dave Hinds who has taken on the organisation of the Speed Watch programme. There is an article on Speed Watch with a picture showing the equipment in action on the village website.

We have a good relationship with our PC and PCSO and they will attempt to resolve any parking problems preferably without issuing tickets.

Finally, I reported in April that we were about to install three dog bins in the village. This didn't happen because of MKC procurement problems. Castlethorpe parish council has now acquired the bins on behalf of the three NAG villages for which it will be refunded by MKC and the bins will be installed in the next week.

On a separate Community Safety issue, the Parish Council has put a questionnaire in Castlethorpe News about creating no cold calling zones in the village after a request from residents because of some incidents of inappropriate selling. Please return these forms and especially encourage any vulnerable neighbours to do the same.

Chairman's Report 4th October 2010

Village Website

The website has been running for two years now and is maintained mainly by Peter Haynes and me. Peter has now indicated that he wishes to retire as Webmaster at the end of 2010. There is an invitation to any interested resident to work with me in keeping the articles on the website fresh and current so please form an orderly queue.

Our thanks to Peter for his work in setting up the website which is clearly appreciated as shown by the continuing high level of usage.

Once again, we have achieved a great deal in the last six months. This parish council has been particularly successful in bringing in grants to help fund our various initiatives as it is not possible to fund solely out of the precept. However, the grants are now drying up with the general economic climate and, although we will continue to push forward, the rate of progress is likely to be slower. But, to look on the bright side, we have achieved a huge amount over the past 3½ years when money was available and we still have still plenty of plans.

Philip Ayles

Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council