

Once again, the parish council has been very active with many achievements for the village over the past year.

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, such as the Hanslope Park Area Forum or the Parishes' Forum, to get other improvements to the village. Some of these are funded by Milton Keynes Council but we have to raise money, usually through grants, for others.

Village Hall

The refurbishment of the Village Hall was substantially completed in the previous financial year 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 have some new lighting along the footpath to the new entrance and we are planning to level the ground by the old entrance. Our thanks to the Village Hall Committee who work very hard to improve the Hall and also to run social events to keep the Hall the focal point of village life.

Sports Ground

We have had the new grass cutting equipment for a year now. 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 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.

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

Finally, the hard court area has been steam cleaned, repainted and repaired for the 2011 season and we hope that good use will be made of the refurbished facilities.

Play Areas

The next big project for the parish council is the improvement of the Fishponds play areas. Although MKC maintain the play area, and we got them to re-seed and level the playing area, they will not provide new equipment – we did ask – and the climbing frame has now had to be cordoned off.

The project has proved very complex. We started by getting MKC to prepare a design which is on the notice boards and village website. The cost of this work is about £50,000. The parish council decided to put together a package of funding; we had to fight for, but eventually got onto, the second wave of the

Government PlayBuilder scheme and we also decided to apply to WREN (the Waste Recycling charity) for funding. Our thanks to all the village organisations which wrote letters of support for our WREN application. Finally, we had been successful in getting a small Parish Partnership Grant from MKC.

The upshot is that we have got a £50,000 project ready to roll at a cost to the parish precept of only £2,700. The work will start in the next couple of weeks and should be complete by the summer.

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.

We are very pleased that, after several years of effort, we have got the parking area in The Chequers re-surfaced. The parish council have also erected, with match funding, to erect a new 'heritage style' streetlight at the entrance to the village shop which has even now been switched on after a long delay and a lot of chasing. We have also put a 4th dog bin on North Street by the corner with Fox Covert Lane as requested by residents.

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' and a dry pond is to be constructed at Tathall End which will regulate the flow of water to the dips and should stop the frequent flooding.

The A508 – Yardley Road Junction

We have been pressing for improvements at the junction for a long time but we were able to get a site meeting last year with both our MP, Mark Lancaster, and Andrea Leadsom, the MP for the constituency which includes the junction, plus representatives from Northants CC and MKC, our Ward Councillor and the four parish councils including Hanslope, Haversham and Cosgrove.

At this meeting, Northants presented a design, funded by planning gain from the Thrupp marina, for widening the road on the east side (our side) but this would have cost £300,000 and, because there have been no recent accidents, was regarded as unaffordable. Northants CC and MKC agreed to do a second design on the west (Furtho) side which should be cheaper. However, they have since reneged on this commitment but MKC have agreed to do the design themselves which is pretty good as the junction is in Northants.

Clearly, with funding constraints, any improvement is unlikely in the immediate future but the important thing is to get a design completed and ready to go as soon as times improve.

Public Transport

MKC have produced a series of cutbacks for public transport as part of their spending review. The impact on the 33 service is the loss of Sunday services and the 6.30pm return service from the city centre. All of these were very poorly used.

However, there is also a risk to the daytime 33 services to Northampton which are subsidised by Northants so, with our Ward Cllr, we attended the MKC Decision Meeting and obtained a commitment to look at other

travel options for the 6.30pm bus and that MKC would fund the 33 service as far as Hanslope even if Northants pulled out.

Village 'Centre'

The next big project will be to make the area outside the Village Hall and Carrington more attractive, keeping the green and tree, of course, as well as providing a safe crossing to the village hall as requested by the school and nursery. Three options were formally presented by the MK Design Team before the meeting on 7th March and are available again tonight. They are also available on the village website.

The parish council intends to have a long consultation period with residents – you can send you comments now to the MKC designer – and then get the selected design costed and start applying for grants. MKC have put some funding into their 2011/12 budget but we will need more.

Concluding Remarks

There are a number of smaller initiatives; after the spate of aggressive salesmen last summer, we have worked with Trading Standards and a leaflet explaining residents' rights and when callers have to go away will be issued to all households as soon as MKC have printed it.

The parish council also applied for funding to create one of the government's new Vanguard Neighbourhood Plans. Our own Parish Plan expires at the end of this year and I hope that the new Parish Council will encourage the production of a new plan.

I would stress that all this information is available as it happens on the village website together with all upcoming events and lots of other information. I'd like to thank Peter Haynes for his work as one of the webmasters over the past two years and to welcome Judith Goodger to replace him. The website is an important and valuable village facility which is well used and admired by other parishes.

Finally, the parish council has set a precept which has increased by 1.99% which is an extra £1 a year for each Band 'D' household. With the loss of about £2,500 from the bond for the Sports Ground due to low interest rates, higher gas and electricity prices as well as other increases, we felt we needed this minimum increase to continue to provide good facilities in our village.

This is the last Chairman's Report from this parish council as we have elections on 5th May but I believe that this council has achieved a great deal in the past four years and I would like to record my thanks to Councillors, our Clerk and to our Ward Councillor as this has been a real team effort.

Philip Ayles

Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council