

This is the first report of the Parish Council since the elections in May and I would like to welcome Mrs Geraldine Sweetland as a new parish councillor. The Parish Council has continued to make significant improvements to the Village.

1. 'Fishponds' Play Area

The new play area at the Fishponds was opened on Saturday 11th June by Andy Dransfield, the Milton Keynes Council Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, and me on behalf of the Parish Council.

The play area is intended to extend the range of young people who can use the area even including lounging logs for those who prefer to lounge rather than play! At the same time, the existing equipment has been refurbished.

This project has taken about three years of work by the Parish Council and funds have been obtained from the Waste Recycling charity (WREN) who provided £42,800, the government's PlayBuilder Scheme (£4,700), an MKC Parish Partnership Fund grant of £5,400 and a contribution of £2,700 from the parish precept. This represents excellent value for the village and it has been a pleasure to see the play area well used over the summer especially during the school holidays.

2. Sports Ground

The Parish Council has been successful in obtaining a Parish Partnership Fund grant of £5,000 from MKC for improvements to the Sports Ground. The grant requires 'match funding' of a further £5,000 which will come from the Parish Council and other organisations to value the total improvement project at a minimum of £10,000. This will include the provision of hot water and heating to make the pavilion useable year round and extend its use.

The Sports Ground Committee will be leading this work and will start with a public meeting in October.

We also welcome Castlethorpe Rovers football team as a new resident team at the Sports Ground.

3. Village Centre

Residents will probably be aware that a consultation has taken place on improvements to the centre of our village in the area outside the village hall and Carrington Arms. One specific objective is to provide a safe crossing from the Carrington to the village hall as requested by the school and nursery in the 2008 Parish Plan. The safe crossing has been funded by MKC in their 2011/12 budget after lobbying by the Parish Council and our Ward Councillor. It is also hoped that additional car parking will be provided at the back of the green as part of the proposed Station Yard development. Although the owner of the Carrington has told the Parish Council that he is waiting for some improvement in the economy before making the large investment in refurbishing the pub, additional parking will be useful and the land is partly owned by him.

The crossing and car parking create an opportunity to improve the centre of the village and the Parish Council has created a Working Group which will hold public meetings to make a recommendation on what features from the various MKC designs should be progressed. The Parish Council encourages villagers to attend these meetings. It is the heart of our village.

4. **Neighbourhood Plan**

Residents made a huge contribution to the 2008-11 Parish Plan which was mostly written by village organisations. The new government will introduce 'Neighbourhood Plans' which will be more formal than our Parish Plan. The Localism Bill will give communities a number of rights including the right to buy key neighbourhood assets and the right to build. Communities will be able to set development policy providing it fits with national and principal authority (MKC) plans.

Neighbourhood Plans will be subject to review by an external inspector and then they will be put to a referendum. If more than 50% of voters approve, then the planning aspects become law.

All this costs a lot of money and the Parish Council decided to apply to be a *vanguard* neighbourhood so that we could get a government grant of £20,000. There aren't many vanguard neighbourhoods nationally but, with the support of MKC, Castlethorpe has become one of only four vanguard parishes in MK.

The guidelines for Neighbourhood Plans are still being finalised and we expect to start our new plan early in 2012. We hope that residents and village organisations will give the new Plan the same enthusiastic support given to our Parish Plan and of course that the new Plan will be as successful as the last.

5. **Renewable Energy Policy**

The Parish Council became concerned about the out-dated state of MKC's renewable energy planning policy in 2010 and has been pressing for it to be amended since then principally to relate distances away from dwellings, bridleways and footpaths to the height of wind turbines i.e. the bigger it is the further away it should be. Castlethorpe has been leading the other Milton Keynes parishes in asking for a review and a new supplementary planning policy is due to be published in October.

This precedes and is not related to the wind farms at Stoke Heights and Orchard Way neither of which has been considered by the Parish Council.

6. **The Yardley Road / A508 Junction**

The saga continues. Residents may recall that an initial design was presented to Cosgrove, Castlethorpe, Hanslope and Haversham parish councils, our Ward Councillor and the two MPs last October. However, it was very expensive and Northants CC undertook to do a second design widening the west side of the junction. Unfortunately, they reneged on this on budget grounds but fortunately MKC, who have an in-house design resource, undertook the design which has been discussed by the parish councils and is now going for approval by Cosgrove.

Once we have an approved design, we will then have to wait until both councils can find the funds to widen the junction but at least we now have a viable design ready to go when funds permit.

7. **Alternative Service Delivery**

This phrase is used to describe the move of delivery of services from MK Council to the parishes. The Parish Council has attended several workshops and has made a non-binding expression of interest in taking over grass-cutting and the maintenance of the play areas. We are awaiting a response to see if this would be in the interests of residents and rate-payers.

Philip Ayles

Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council