

Since our last village meeting in October, there have been two important changes of people.

Firstly, Peter Haynes resigned as a Councillor in December on health grounds. Peter has served the parish for 11 years both as Clerk and as Councillor. He was Vice Chairman from 2007-11 and Chair of the Finance Committee. During that time, he helped bring about a sea-change in the way in which the parish council financed improvements shifting the emphasis to getting external grants. The measure of success was that, in this period, the parish council completed major projects at the Village hall, Sports Ground and Play Area worth £137,000 at a cost of less than £14,000 to the parish. He also served as webmaster on the village website and wrote the parish council section of 'Castlethorpe News'. The Parish Council has now co-opted Julian Present-Collins as Councillor to replace Peter. Julian is well known in the village and has previously served as Councillor.

Secondly, Karen Hill has resigned as Clerk. Karen has been Clerk since 2007 and has been responsible for undertaking all of the improvement projects and for successfully completing the various grant applications. Karen has been extremely hard working on behalf of the council, kept us all in line so that our decisions are lawful and been the driver behind all of our projects. Without Karen, these simply would not have happened. The Parish Council has now appointed Steve Bradbury as Clerk and he will work together with Karen during April and take over at our May Meeting.

At the October meeting, I said that the parish council had obtained a match-funded grant for improvements to the Sports Ground. We want to put heating and hot water and insulation into the cricket pavilion so that it can be used as a meeting room, replace the showers and re-surface the floor in the football pavilion as well as increase frost protection. Although the tendering process has been longer than we had hoped, work should start soon.

After almost a year of consultation, the parish council has decided on a preferred plan for improvements to the village centre. This is based around a safe crossing from the Carrington to the Village Hall which was requested in the previous Parish Plan and will create a slightly raised and paved table from the Village hall across North Street and down to the entrance to the Station Yard. Unfortunately, Milton Keynes Council now tell us that there will have to be a further consultation on the final design before we can proceed with final costings and grant applications. This is frustrating but it is a long term improvement to the village so we hope it will be worth the wait.

A development application was made to erect 9 dwellings in the Station Yard. There was a slight majority of residents in favour of affordable or low cost housing in the Yard as opposed to light industrial use in the Parish Plan and the parish council therefore supported the application in principle whilst asking that a number of concerns raised by planning officers be addressed. This was upheld by the MK Development Control and we await a revised plan.

We have also finalised a design for improvements to the A508 / Yardley Road junction which featured very strongly in the 2008 village survey. The junction is in Cosgrove Parish in Northants but we have also got agreement in principle for MKC to part fund the improvement as it

particularly affects Hanslope and Castlethorpe. Having finalised the design with Cosgrove, we have now had to hand the project to them to progress with Northants County Council.

I have referred three times now to our Parish Plan and indeed the Plan was used as part of our very successful grant applications over the past four years. We applied for funding to produce a new 'Neighbourhood Plan' and won a 'Vanguard' award along with only three other parishes in Milton Keynes. We are the only rural parish to do so. The Neighbourhood Plan is specifically to do with development planning and we will produce a new Parish Plan in parallel with it. The Parish Council has formed a Steering group, which will hold public meetings, to determine the process but the decisions will be made in a small number of full Plan Meetings in which we hope that all village organisations and all interested residents will participate. The value of this can be seen from our success over the past four years. The Neighbourhood Plan will determine what development takes place. It has to be approved by an external inspector and put to a village referendum after which, if approved, it will become planning law. This is all very important and I hope that as many people and organisations as possible will participate.

The Parish Council has also been pressing for a change in Wind Turbine Policy at Milton Keynes Council and a draft Planning Document has just completed its consultation. This would relate the height of turbines to their distance from dwellings. We await the outcome. I would stress that there are no applications for large turbines in the parish although the Orchard Way Wind Farm at Haversham would be seen from the east side of the village.

Much of the Parish Council's work has been on Highways matters. We have been pressing for improvements at the Dips and an application to construct some dry ponds at Tathall End to contain flood water is now in progress. We have got a new ramp outside the old Village Hall entrance, a new grit bin for Prospect Place (funded by the Ward Councillor), the pavement opposite the War memorial levelled and an extra car parking space in front of the school but we still have a long list of items outstanding on which we continue to press.

To stray into the area covered by our Neighbourhood Action Group, their priorities are speeding, parking and dog fouling.

On speeding, the Community Speed Watch team, organised by Dave Hinds, continues to operate regularly in the village. Thanks particularly to John Sweetland and John Keane for turning out to do this. Speeding vehicles will get a letter initially from the police with further action if the offence is repeated.

Parking remains a problem. The parish council is trying to get the North Street bus stop marked out so that vehicles will not park there and to put white lines at the entrance to New Road so that vehicles leaving New Road will not be unsighted.

Anecdotally, dog fouling has much improved on the roads since the parish council has provided dog bins and we thank all responsible dog owners for this. The problems are now at the Sports Ground and in the Fishponds Play Area. Dogs are not permitted, even on leads, in the Sports Ground and both the cricket and football teams have complained about dog mess on their pitches which has to be cleared before play because of the risk of some very nasty diseases. The Parish Council has now applied for a dog exclusion order from MKC which would mean that fixed penalties will be given by MKC wardens to owners taking their dog on the Sports Ground. We would point out that, at some expense a few years ago, the footpath from Thrupp Close into

Castle Field and again at the Lodge farm Court end has been fenced off so that dog walkers can walk across Castle Field and also onto the Hanslope footpath without entering the Sports Ground. The Parish Council will also apply for dogs to be kept on a lead in the Fishponds Play Area.

The Parish Council also took advantage of a good offer to purchase some more general rubbish bins to reduce litter around the village.

Unfortunately, the Parish Council has had to increase its precept by just under 3% for 2012/13. This amounts to about £1.80 per household per year. Our costs increase and there are no off-setting economies open to us – we only have one part-time Clerk. Parish Councils also got no financial compensation from the Government as, for example, Milton Keynes did in order to freeze their much larger council tax.

On a brighter note, the Parish Council is supporting a celebration for the Diamond Jubilee on Monday 4th June. There will be a Senior Citizens Lunch, a Children's Event and, in the evening, a Barn Dance and Pig Roast. Some very generous donations have been received and the evening event will be self-funding. We are hoping to have a beacon on Castle Field to end the evening. We appreciate the number of people who have come forward to help run different parts of the day. We hope for good weather and that as many of our residents as possible will be able to join in.

Philip Ayles

Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council