

Another year has gone by and it's time for me to report on what has happened in the past year and what will be happening in the future.

As you may know, the parish council looks after a few facilities itself – mainly the village hall and the sports ground both through committees – and then lobbies MKC to do other things for us.

John Foakes will report separately on the village hall but the parish council was successful in getting a 50% grant for improving the acoustics and we have also purchased a buffer to keep the floor in good condition.

Most of our work this year has been up at the sports ground where we have installed a new central heating and hot water system in the cricket pavilion. This makes the pavilion usable as a second, smaller meeting room particularly when the village hall is in use. We still have a small amount of work to do in the cricket pavilion. The football pavilion has had new showers fitted and we are currently laying a new floor as the original one has been damaged.

We are also responsible for acquiring new equipment in the play areas and we have put some new picnic tables in the Fishponds play area which we hope will make the play area more attractive if summer ever comes.

Finally, MKC won't install dog bins or more salt bins. The parish council has installed and is responsible for having the 5 dog bins emptied. Our ward councillor has bought one new salt bin for Prospect Place and he is using his Ward Fund to buy another outside the school. However, the parish council is responsible for filling these.

We have had quite a lot of difficulty with particularly the Highways department at MKC in 2012 with the result that our village centre scheme stalled. New people have been appointed at MKC and we have revived the scheme and the final design, which is on the notice board in the village hall, will have a final brief public consultation. The scheme is to provide a safe crossing especially for children from the Carrington to the village hall, a slow vehicle area between the pub and village green for events such as the very successful Jubilee last year, carol singing and for pub users – more in a minute - crossing to the green. Please respond to the consultation especially to say what surface you think would be best. The parish council by a majority prefers a red tarmac though I personally would prefer rustic blocks.

You probably all know that an application was made to put 9 houses in Station Yard. The first application had a number of issues and the parish council expressed its reservation on the design. The second application was significantly different and received the support of the parish council and was approved by Development Control.

The owner is Simon Hill and he has said that he would renovate the pub at the same time as he has workmen on site at Station Yard. He expected this to be in May. I spoke to him last week for an update and, of course, the weather has caused delay on his previous job and there is a

problem with the formal issue of his planning permission which Andrew Geary and I are trying to move along. We want the Station Yard and pub work finished and heavy equipment gone before we start on the village centre. Simon has also agreed to construct some parking spaces at the back of the green which is actually his land as part of Station Yard.

Many of you attended the extra meeting we held 2 weeks ago to discuss the wind turbine. The parish council has opposed this on the grounds of unacceptable visual and noise impact being closer than the 1km specified in the new planning document which coincidentally the parish council sponsored and was adopted by MKC last year.

Generally on planning, we are trying to get what is called a Neighbourhood Plan in place which would specify what, if any, development we want in the parish. We have a grant for this and are using it to contract a specialist organisation, Community Impact Bucks, to do the bulk of the work. We will refresh our Parish Plan, which gives the parish council a 'to do' list for the next 5 years, at the same time so again, please respond when we eventually get the survey out to you.

The parish council is trying to get a Dog Control Order set up by MKC for the sports ground to stop dog mess on the playing surfaces. It appears that MK has never had a Dog Control Order before so again Castlethorpe seems to be the forerunner.

We are also lobbying on superfast broadband as you have heard Martyn Smith say. We want Hanslope Exchange to be at the top of the list for rural broadband in MK.

The Community Speed Watch equipment broke last summer and took an age to repair but is now operational and the volunteers are out again. If you would like to volunteer – an hour of your time perhaps once a month, please contact Dave Hinds.

Our financial position is good and we have sufficient funds for schemes such as the village centre. We have a new threat which is that we had an unwelcome visit from the Rating Officer and we now have to pay £500pa business rates for the cricket pavilion. We do not yet know whether there will be further rates payable at the Sports Ground. Our Clerk is negotiating this for us and has already achieved a major reduction on their initial position.

However, our standing costs such as utility bills and insurance continue to increase and the parish council has set a 2% increase which is a total of £473 or just over £1 per house in the full year on average. I hope you will see this increase as reasonable and actually quite small even though these are difficult times.

That concludes my report.

*Philip Ayles*

Chair, Castlethorpe Parish Council