

Annual Parish Meeting 6th April 2009

Chairman's Report

Introduction

Welcome. This is the Annual Parish Meeting which, by law, has to be held annually at about this time.

It is not a Parish Council (PC) Meeting. There is a separate PC meeting which will follow the Parish Meeting. However, the PC has arranged the Parish Meeting agenda which we hope will cover all the main points of interest.

The Annual Parish Meeting is a meeting for the residents and residents are able to put forward resolutions for discussion though none have been received by the Clerk for this meeting.

I thought it was worth introducing the report on the PC's activities over the last 6 months by saying what a PC is meant to do and then describing what we have done against that.

- The PC is directly responsible for some facilities which it owns, primarily the Village Hall and the Sports Ground.
- The PC is a statutory consultee on planning matters by MKC which is the planning authority
- The PC represents village issues to MKC to make sure we are getting the service that we should.

So what have we done?

Facilities.

Both the village hall and the sports ground are in need of some rather expensive attention.

The cost is beyond what can be directly funded out of the precept raised by the parish council and there is only a relatively small amount of planning gain that we can draw upon so we have and are pursuing outside grants.

1. The Village Hall

The Village Hall needs an extensive programme of work as identified in the Parish Plan including new toilet facilities, a new entrance which is both safer for children and providing disabled access, general repair and redecoration and insulation in the roof space. We also want to replace the boiler and install safer 'cool touch' radiators.

Over the last 6 months, the PC has obtained quotes for all this work and has submitted an application for funding to WREN, the waste recycling grant organisation. The decision process is unfortunately very long and will not be made finally until July but we have advised the prospective contractors that work would have to be done in the summer holidays when Pre-school are not using the hall. WREN require an 11% contribution to the grant and the last of our planning gain will be used for this.

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WREN don't fund roof insulation and we have a second application ready to be submitted to Eon for a grant for that which should reduce heating bills considerably and ease the pressure on charging for use of the hall.

The PC is also developing contingency plans to apply to other grant giving organisations in case the WREN grant application is not successful.

For what I understand is the first time ever, the PC is providing a direct subsidy to the VH rental rates (mainly because of the huge increase in utility bills) and the VH users are running a number of fundraisers as well to make the budget balance which Carol and Judith will mention in their reports later.

2. The Sports Ground

The Sports Ground (SG) has not had any money spent on it for many years other than cutting the grass and hedges. The previous PC had obtained two Parish Partnership Grants (PPGs); one of £4,000 to surface the footpaths and one for £750 to provide additional parking. The problem is that PPGs have to be matched on a 50-50 basis and the PC doesn't have £4,750 and in fact the footpath improvement will cost far more than £8,000.

The footpath, which many of you will know is only hardcore without a tarmac surface which is unsuitable for disabled or wheeled use, doesn't allow disabled access to the hard court area and the disabled access at the Lodge Farm Court end does not comply with legislation.

The PC has therefore successfully applied for a grant to the Milton Keynes Community Foundation (MKCF). With the grant from MKCF, the PPG and some funding from the PC directly, we can put a project together and the PC later tonight will award a contract so that work can start.

The PC has also agonised over the Nature Area which became very unsightly despite attempts by some of us to cut it back. Luke Stacey has kindly agreed to put down green waste as a weed suppressant around the trees and the grassed area will be cut as part of our contract with Warners to cut the sports ground this year. First cut made and favourable comments.

The number of cuts by the PC of the SG is being increased from 12 to 15 as it became clear last year that 12 was insufficient. Luke has also offered to spray the SG as weeds have taken hold. Luke has the necessary safe sprays and licences.

On the additional parking, Philip Sawbridge has kindly offered to do this work which will create a further 6-8 spaces and this work has started.

The PC has also decided to employ a part time groundsman, Andrew Massey, to do small jobs each week and keep the grounds tidy.

The PC has also made budget provision for external decoration of the buildings at the SG as they have not been decorated since they were built and the wood is in danger of becoming rotten.

Many of you will be aware that the PC has a bond of £50,000 the interest from which is used to defray the costs of maintaining the SG. Due to the good work of the Clerk

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and the establishment of a Finance Committee which permitted more nimble decision making, we have been able to invest the bond at a fixed rate of 5.9% until September 2010. We did this just after the government increased its guarantee to investors from £30->£50k and just before interest rates tumbled so we have an exceptional deal for the village.

The budget for the SG is about £5,000 and this will be funded by usage fees from the clubs and tennis users, the interest from the bond and a direct subsidy of about £800 from the PC.

The PC has also applied for a PPG for its own grass-cutting equipment which, if successful and if matching funds can be raised, would further reduce the maintenance costs in future years.

3. Traffic Calming

The PC has also arranged the installation of traffic calming by MKC. This has been a policy of previous PCs and in fact a PPG of £5,000 had been obtained which would have expired on 31st March this year.

This PC arranged for speed measuring to be done at the 3 entrances. Speeds were about 45-50mph on Hanslope Rd and about 40mph on Bullington End Road.

The PC took note of the preference expressed in the village survey for humps rather than narrows and investigated costs. However, these were about £15,000 for each hump plus some preliminary measure – you're not allowed to launch a car into the air even if it is speeding. This compared with a cost of £11,000 in total for so-called 'priority workings'. Humps were simply unaffordable.

We therefore unanimously decided to proceed with the current measures funded by the PPG, a small planning gain which also expired on 31st March and which could only be used for road improvements and the capital from the 2008/9 and 2009/10 precept.

The implementation was preceded by a public consultation period of 6 weeks during which no representations were made. Progress was regularly reported in 'Castlethorpe News', on the website and in the Minutes of the PC.

Cllrs have received a number of adverse comments about visibility of the narrows and, it is fair to say, also a number of general compliments. Although Cllrs had received both site plans and detailed design, we were expecting new street lights on Hanslope Rd and Bullington End Rd rather than 3 on Wolverton Rd and we asked that additional lights be installed when Richard Duffill, the MKC Highways Manager, came to the last PC Meeting. Following the comments and our own concerns, Richard has come out and we have walked all 3 areas. We have asked that the 30mph limit on Bullington End is moved to the traffic calming, that reflective bollards are installed in front of the posts (as Richard believes they should), that additional temporary yellow warnings are erected and that road markings are improved.

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Planning

MKC is the planning authority but they are obliged to consult with the PC. During the past 6 months, an application was submitted by Carrington Estates for the erection of 14 dwellings on the site of the Maltings Farm.

After 6 months of vigorous objection by the Parish Council to the terms of this Application for 14 dwellings, the Application has now been approved by Milton Keynes Council's Development Control Committee (DCC). The revised terms represent a great success for the parish.

The Parish Council did not object in principle to the change of use of the farm buildings to housing as they are now mainly disused and it was one of two areas (the other being the Old Station Yard) within the village envelope identified in the Parish Plan for possible development. However, the Parish Council had a number of objections relating to the benefits that would accrue to the village including the amount of planning gain.

The original proposal gave the village two new pieces of equipment in the playareas and £1,350 for new allotments. The Parish Council felt this was totally inadequate. Meetings were held with the developer and with MKC and it even wrote to Lord Carrington but all to little avail.

The Parish Council therefore decided to object formally in accordance with the views of residents and councillors at a special PC meeting on 19th November and to put forward a speaker at the DCC meeting which was held on 15th January to object on the grounds of non-inclusion of any affordable housing (a current requirement for 2 'affordable' homes was identified in the village survey), the overall size of the planning gain and the share of the planning gain between MKC and the parish. The objection was unanimously upheld by DCC and, in a meeting with MKC in February, a new settlement was negotiated. This was agreed by the developer, the Parish Council withdrew its objection and the Application was approved by DCC on 5th March.

The terms sought and obtained by the Parish Council are:

- Affordable Housing. The site is too small for the developer to be obliged legally to provide affordable housing but the developer has committed in writing to work with the Parish Council to identify a Rural Housing Exception site for affordable housing. There is no immediate intention to do this by the Parish Council but we have the offer for the future.
- South Street Paddock. The Parish Council had sought ownership of the paddock to protect it though it was advised that this could not legally be included as a planning obligation. However, the paddock has part of an ancient monument on it – the moat - and can never be built upon. The developer intends to rent part of the development including the farmhouse and wants to protect the outlook.

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They have agreed to allow the village occasional use of the paddock for village events e.g. fete. By retaining the paddock, Carrington Estates also retain the liability for maintaining the wall (which has subsequently partly collapsed) rather than this being a burden on our precept.

- Planning Gain. The Parish Council has negotiated the following payments which will be payable when the development is completed:
 - The original sum of £15,824 offered for play equipment remains
 - The original sum of £1,350 for new allotments remains
 - A new sum of £31,186 for social and physical infrastructure improvements was obtained
 - A new sum of £2,000 for capital equipment for Youth Club was obtained.
- Streetlight. As part of the planning obligation, the developer will replace the streetlight at the entrance by one in a heritage style. As this is part of the Parish Council's plans, this is worth about £2,000 to the village.

Given the planning rules which also have to take account of current economic circumstances, this represents a total of £50,360 planning gain plus other concessions and is an excellent result for the village though of course we won't get the money until the houses are built and 1/3rd are occupied.

The PC is unhappy about the planning processes, especially lack of consultation, that were shown by this application which was the first after a number of government and MKC rules had changed. It became clear at the Parishes Assembly that a number of other parishes share this view and I am working personally with Andrew, a number of other ward councillors and the Chairman of one of the urban parishes to get some improvements so that parishes, especially rural parishes, don't have to have the same sort of fight in future.

Representing the Parish to MKC

MKC are responsible for most of our services such as street lighting, rubbish, public transport and most of all highways maintenance and grass-cutting with the exception of the Sports Ground (which we cut because it is ours).

The PC and the Clerk spends a considerable amount of time raising issues of inadequate services.

Grasscutting. Big disappointment in all parishes in MK because of high growth last summer. We have been promised an improved service this year but expect to have to press MKC again.

Highways. Highway repairs so poor and no response to our enquiries that CPC has held a meeting with Pele Bhambher the overall Director at MKC to express our dissatisfaction face to face. Chris Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways who signs off for expenditure and Ian McGregor also present. Very constructive meeting with commitments for most work in summer with Bullington End Road flooding from rear access road and Devil's Dip probably in 2010/11.

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Public Transport. Constant fight for improved services led by Bert. However, there is a new timetable coming in June which should improve the frequency of services to hourly at least to MK. NCC won't pay for the carry through to Northampton so that service will become 2 hourly. We have arranged a meeting later this week with the MKC Passenger Transport Officer to give the views of Castlethorpe, Hanslope and Haversham to MKC. We are also hoping to get an 1830 bus back to the village which should help people working in CMK and it will meet a London train at Wolverton. If we don't get this in June, we should get it in October.

We will also be pushing for through buses to the hospital, improved reliability and even a round service to Stony as in the Parish Plan though we may not achieve this in this round. The PC has written to ask for funding from CMK parking (intended for improving bus services) to be used to improve service to Castlethorpe.

A508 Junction. Strictly this is an NCC issue though MKC have put aside money in the past and, we understand, are prepared to do so again when the feasibility study is completed. This was one of the biggest issues for residents in the village survey and the PC has arranged to Mark Lancaster to come to the village hall at 7.30pm on 16th April to discuss this and any other matters.

Please come along if you possibly can and make sure Mark knows the strength of feeling about improvements to the junction. We have also invited Hanslope, Haversham, and Cosgrove PCs to come as they are supporting the case for improvement.

Finance

As I have said, we are increasingly trying to obtain grants for our capital projects. We also have the investment bond for the SG but the bulk of our running costs and the seed money for our capital projects comes from the precept which we set and which is collected by MKC though the Council Tax.

The precept per Band D household will be £49.84. This precept is below the average for MK of £56.42.

The precept is £22,951 and will be used for

- £10,498 for Admin and miscellaneous expenditure. About half is the cost of the Clerk and the remainder is mostly non-discretionary expenditure such as Insurance and audit.
- £1,000 Buildings maintenance - village hall and sports pavilions (note village hall refurbishment is a separate project)
- £1,220 for grass cutting / hedge cutting of parish council areas other than the playing fields and mostly at the sports ground.
- £833 as a subsidy to the separate sports ground accounts above the income from the bond and usage fees
- £500 as a subsidy to the separate VH accounts above the income from usage fees
- £2,500 for matching PPG for traffic calming (or it would expire)
- £2,000 for matching PPG for path at the sports ground (or it would expire)

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- £2,000 for other projects (e.g. matching PPG for parking at Sports Ground) and other projects or maintenance
- £2,000 to reserves as we are well below the level recommended by NALC.

Finally

A major achievement for 2008 was the publication of the Parish Plan and thanks to residents for one of the best response rates in MK and to all the village organisations and individuals who helped produce the plan.

For the first time, it gives a list of the direction we want of the village and the projects needed to take us there. It was formally adopted by CPC in December and lodged with MKC.

The Plan is really important for

- planning matters (used in our argument on Maltings)
- grants – used for WREN and MKCF
- getting attention by MKC in projects (e.g. Highways and Public Transport).

One of the outcomes was the creation of a Parish Website by a small group especially Gavin McDermott who built the site and also Dave Hinds, Sonal, Zoe Raven, Tony McKnight, Peter Haynes and me who designed it and especially to Peter for being the webmaster. This is very well used with about 15-20 people viewing the website each day and a total of <400 separate computers have visited which I think is amazing given there are only 430 households. Notices, Forthcoming Events, Small Ads, Local Businesses, Local Job Vacancies, sections for social and sports (football results) including booking forms, parish council news and Minutes, NAG and photo gallery. Use the website and please send in events you are running – perhaps you'll improve attendance. Also send in photos of any village events.

It has been a very busy 6 months. We have accomplished a lot and laid the foundations for a lot more in the coming year.

Philip Ayles
Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council