

Chairman's Report to the Annual Village Meeting 4th April 2016

Once again, the parish council has had a very busy year both with activities we directly control and cajoling MKC to do things for us.

We have had a big push to get our Neighbourhood Plan completed as this has been running for some time now. The parish council consultations have completed and the final MKC consultation will end on 13th April. An independent External Examiner will be appointed- on the advice of our consultant, we have put two names forward who have experience of plans like ours - and, assuming no major problems, we should be able to hold a referendum this summer. The Neighbourhood Plan will protect certain areas of the village from residential development as 'Green Space' or 'Community Assets' including anywhere outside the settlement boundary, it will ensure developments and extensions are consistent with existing design in other areas and it designates the field next to Paddock Close ('Maltings 2') for the development of about 30 houses of which 9 will be 'affordable'.

The MKC consultation on Strategic Development Directions ends tomorrow so please make sure that, if you haven't already done so, you put in your comments against a satellite settlement near Castlethorpe. A settlement would completely overwhelm the village and destroy the way of life we enjoy. Our Neighbourhood Plan shows a responsible attitude to development and the village has had a good record of taking small developments every 5-10 years which we can assimilate. Your response counts.

The parish council has taken the lead in mobilising rural parish councils against this consultation and has contributed to a fund to get a barrister's opinion and a formal letter has gone to MKC putting down a marker that they have not followed due process. If they continue with the option of a satellite settlement, we will put this breach in front of the Inspector at Public Examination to get the Local Plan rejected.

The parish council entered into a lease of the Sports Ground with the newly formed Castlethorpe Sports Association, consisting of the cricket, football and tennis clubs. This will have the benefit of putting control of the ground into the hands of its main users but importantly it also avoids a £3000pa business rates bill which would have been incurred by the parish council as new ratings pushed us over the small business exemption level. In preparation for the lease, the parish council completed a number of repairs including, after many years, recommissioning the tennis court lights.

At the village hall, the leaning bell tower has been brought up to current building standards through donations from Lord Carrington and the Coles Trust. New lights have been put in the side passage, the hall has been redecorated, a new cooker and microwave have been donated courtesy of John Lewis. Only last week, a new soakaway was dug to stop a long running problem of damp from the gutters.

We have a project to improve the village entrances with new signs, designed by a resident, Jenny Cahill, and framed by Oliver Sawbridge. These will be mounted on white fencing at the entrances which, we are advised, should also slow drivers down. The parish council is grateful for donations from the Open Gardens Committee to allow us to do this.

At the same time, we have worked with the MKC Road Safety Officer and the Highways department to slow traffic and rumble strips have been installed on Wolverton Road. New white lining should be painted on Station Road and we are working with Highways on solutions for Bullington End Rd and Hanslope Rd. We can produce evidence of speeding because we continue to operate the SIDs which record vehicle speeds though not registration numbers. Nonetheless, as a result of the SID records, the police have been out on several occasions with speed guns and caught quite a haul of vehicles. We must get the message across - don't speed in Castlethorpe!

I regret to say that there have been two more burglaries in the village this year. The same method was used to gain access to the houses in both cases which was to break open a key safe and then use the keys. I have put short articles on both the website and Facebook page.

We have renewed posts and chains at the North Street bus stop. We have had the barrier on Station Road replaced. We have let a contract to tarmac the path from South Street to the footbridge.

On new projects, it is the parish councils' intention to use some planning gain money to improve our two play areas and we will also apply for a grant to help us complete the improvements in the conservation area by converting the remaining streetlights to heritage style and the waste bins to the black and gold style.

We have had many battles with MKC about the streetlights in Fox Covert where we still have temporary lights while the replacements are on order. Similarly, we had to fight to get the bollards renewed in the village centre and we await the promised reinstatement of the wooden posts by the village green and the long awaited new street sign for Hanslope Rd - only about three years for that now.

Major work was done at the Dips in February to prevent flooding involving a two week road closure. Nonetheless, less than a month after the work was completed, it flooded again. Whilst this was a particularly heavy downpour, it is extremely disappointing. There is, in any case, a hydraulic engineer's report due on the construction of a third bund above Tathall End (which is where the stream comes from) and our Ward Cllrs and I expect to have a meeting with the Head of Highways to discuss further action.

On a more positive note, we have worked well with the new MKC Landscaping contractor. The village looked better than it has for many years and we were runner-up in the Best Kept Village Award despite the pub about which there is no news other than that the owner continues to insist that his intention is to re-open it.

I attended one of the other Local Forums and was also reminded how well we did in getting Castlethorpe high on the priority list for superfast broadband. Many rural villages and even parts of towns do not yet have it and some may never do so.

It is becoming clear that MKC will no longer do a lot of the routine work they previously did and that parish councils will be expected to take it over - such as the barrier on Station Rd. In addition, we contributed to the fighting fund to send a legal letter to MKC on the satellite settlements as well as the inevitable increases on our routine purchases. The parish council has therefore reluctantly decided that it must increase its precept by 3%. However, this will amount to only £1.50 per

household in the full year but the parish council will continue its practice of obtaining external funding for major projects to minimise the cost to the parish as we have successfully done for many years now and we will continue to work hard to improve the village for all our residents.

Philip Ayles
Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council