



Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting, 3rd April 2017

The Milton Keynes Local Plan has been a major distraction during the past year but is so important we couldn't allow ourselves to take our eye off the ball. I notice that, in my Report this time last year, I was urging residents to make sure they submitted responses to the satellite settlement proposals that could potentially have put 10,000 homes on top of Castlethorpe.

Our representations were successful in that satellite settlements were removed but, as you know, this was then replaced with an 'urban extension' to build 6,000 homes on top of Haversham starting at the Dips. We had to run another campaign together with Haversham and with the great support of our Ward Councillors, and managed to get this removed from the draft Plan.

We had employed a consultant together with Hanslope and Haversham and we have all decided to continue to retain him initially to help us make a proper response in the consultation which is now running. We don't want satellite settlements or urban extension making a reappearance. We will be asking residents to respond and provide some guidance before the consultation finishes in June.

It is unbelievable that yet another year has passed without our Neighbourhood Plan being completed. We had a draft Plan which had been through three public consultations and went to an External Examiner when the owners of Gobbys Field put in a late objection, technically after the deadline but they claimed they didn't know about the Plan, and objected to it being designated as a Local Green Space.

Although our professional advice from both MKC and our consultant was that Gobbys met the necessary criteria, the Examiner allowed the objection. We then did a survey - and had a tremendous response, thank you - to provide the evidence of use which the Examiner said was needed and we persuaded MKC to re-run this part of the Examination with a new Examiner. This is still going on. You might wonder if it is all worth it but neighbouring villages which haven't got Neighbourhood Plans have been caught out by a separate failure of MKC to maintain a 5 year housing land supply with the result that they have had unwanted and inappropriate housing foisted on them. A Neighbourhood Plan will protect against this.

Anyway, the new Examiner is just completing her work on another Neighbourhood Plan and then she will review ours but I have given up trying to predict when our Plan will become MKC Policy. Is it hoping too much that it will be this year?

This has all taken a lot of time that I think we all wish could have been devoted to more local matters.

We have unfortunately continued to suffer from a number of burglaries and, as a result, the Neighbourhood Action Group liaising with the police, recommended to Hanslope and Castlethorpe Parish Councils that we acquired ANPR cameras.

The police say we are the first parishes in the Thames Valley area to do this though I wish it hadn't been necessary. They are about £5,000 each which we funded from reserves. We are currently obtaining some signs to make sure villagers are aware of this and are deterred at least from Castlethorpe and Hanslope. Working with the parish council, the police have also held two Crime Awareness events at the village hall encouraging residents to form Neighbourhood Watch groups.

We continue to run the Speed Indicator Device (SID) which we now share with Haversham and thanks to Dave Hinds for moving and charging up the SID every week when it is our turn. The worst road for speeding is Hanslope Road where vehicles enter the village. Other roads have problems but this is the worst and where we are concentrating our discussions with MKC and the police.

The parish council has two major projects in hand. One is to redesign the village green with new benches, continuing the programme of installing heritage style streetlights in the conservation area and changing the litter bins for black and gold heritage style bins. The second project is to acquire some extra play equipment, a zip wire at the Fishponds and some rides for small children at the Thrupp / Bullington play area. We also want to install some adult outdoor exercise equipment at the sports ground. The play and sports equipment will be mostly funded by some planning gain that can only be used for this purpose and we are applying for supplementary grants to minimise the cost to the parish.

The parish council also funded tarmac on the path from South Street to the railway bridge for which we received a match-funded grant from MKC.

Thanks to a fantastic effort by the whole village, we came second (to Wolverton and Greenleys) in the MKC green bin recycling competition by increasing our recycled waste by 30% from the previous year. We won a prize of £3,000 which will be used for one of our projects to improve the whole of the village.

We continue to engage with MKC Landscaping, with particular note of Geraldine Sweetland's work here, to keep the village looking as well as we can despite the reduction in MKC grass-cutting and other services. We will be considering entering the Best Kept Village competition again though we weren't placed last year.

Similarly, I want to note Russell Forgham's work at the village hall and the continuing high standard of Castlethorpe News as well as timely updates on the website and on Facebook.

The sportsground is now leased to the Sports Association and the arrangements seem to be working well. Danny Bugaj was appointed by the Association and the parish council as groundsman and the sportsground is in really good condition.

However, MKC Highways and what they call Public Realm continues to be difficult. We have got all but one of the Fox Covert streetlights replaced with the correct style and some new street signs - only took three years for that - and some new white lining on Station Rd has been ordered and a number of minor repairs to kerbing have been done but we have several items still in progress which probably means exactly the opposite. The most important is completion of the work to prevent flooding at The Dips which has stalled again as personnel change at MKC.

MKC's own budget restrictions, like most local authorities in the country, continue to impact service provision. They are ceasing all weed-spraying and strimming and reducing other landscaping. They are also reducing street cleansing - litter picking and emptying of litter bins - which is having a clearly visible effect on the cleanliness of the village. Another parish has agreed that residents will keep the village clean if MKC will increase litter picking on the roads outside the village. What is clear is that either we have to keep the village clean ourselves or we will have to pay a contractor to do so.

Because of the timing of the budget process, the parish council, like all other parish councils, has to make its decision on precept before it knows the full implications of the MKC service provision. We estimated that we might have to make good a 15% reduction in service from MKC which is about £1000 or 4% of our precept which together with other small but usual increases means that we have increased our precept by a total of 5%. I very much regret this but the parish council feels that it wants to keep the village at least up to the standards previously provided by MKC. I want to assure everyone that, when we come to capital purchases, we always look to supplement our parish funds with whatever grants are available to minimise the impact on residents and keep Castlethorpe a good place to live.

I'd like to close by thanking all parish councillors, our ward councillors, especially Jeannette and Andrew, and Steve, our Clerk, for their hard work and all residents for their support which has been unstinting this past year with public meetings, surveys and consultation responses.

Philip Ayles
Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council