

Chairman's Report to the Parish Meeting Held on 5th October 2009

Welcome again to the Parish Meeting. I would stress that this is Meeting for the Parish and it is not a Parish Council Meeting will which follow this Meeting. Residents are entitled to put forward resolutions though none have been received.

It has been an extremely active 6 months since I last reported to the Parish in April and I am pleased to report on a large number of improvements which have been made to the village facilities through the efforts of your Parish Council and Clerk.

The Village Hall

The largest project has been the refurbishment of the Village Hall. We were successful in our application for a grant of some £43,000 from WREN, the recycling body. Together with some remaining planning gain and funding from the Parish Council, we have been able to redecorate and repair the building inside and out, refurbish the toilets, upgrade the central heating system with new piping and 'cool-touch' radiators, deep clean and seal the floor and insulate the ceiling. This has made the building compliant with OFSTED regulations for the Pre-School as well being more pleasant for all users and reducing heating costs which had become excessive.

Geraldine Sweetland, who is the new Chair of the Village Hall Committee, will tell you more about this and other improvements later.

We have one outstanding piece of work which is the construction of a porch and new main entrance through the existing fire doors. We were initially told by MKC Planning that this did not require planning permission, then that it did but it would be a formality and finally that the Conservation Officer had objected to the design and we await the Planning Officer's decision and the Parish Council will then have to decide on its next steps. However, we do have 12 months in which to complete the porch under the terms of the WREN grant and, as the work is mainly external, it can be done while the Hall remains in use.

The Sports Ground

There have been a number of projects completed and planned at the Sports Ground.

1. Additional parking created using a Parish Partnership Grant from MKC and thanks should be recorded to Philip Sawbridge and Luke Stacey who used their own men and equipment to do the work.
2. The footpath across the Sports Ground from Thrupp to Lodge Farm Court has been given a tarmac surface and extended to tennis courts together with disability ramps and rails. This was done with a grant from MK Community Foundation and a Parish Partnership Grant from MKC.
3. We are currently seeking bids for the external redecoration of the Sports Ground buildings. We had hoped that our handyman would do this but he, rather belatedly, said that he was no longer interested in the role and so we are having to look elsewhere.
4. Luke Stacey has sprayed and put down mulch in the 'Nature Area' behind the football pavilion but it remains unsatisfactory and the Parish Council will be discussing an action plan later.
5. The most exciting news is progress on obtaining our own mowers. The Parish Council has been using a contractor to cut the grass at the Sports Ground. This is expensive and the Parish Council has tried to keep a balance between its duty to keep the area in good repair as a general recreation ground and the needs of the football and cricket club for a higher standard of ground preparation for their matches. This has meant that, on occasion, the Cricket Club has

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had to purchase additional grass cuts.

The Parish Council would like to return to having its own mowers again but there is a substantial cost, between £8,000 and £15,000, for this and the Parish Council has also been very occupied with all the other developments. However, we did apply for a Parish Partnership Grant from MKC. These have to be matched by other funds raised by the Parish Council but we went for the top of the range and we have been told that we have been awarded the maximum of £7,500. The Parish Council will be discussing the next steps in its meeting tonight.

Milton Keynes Council

One of the main roles of the Parish Council is to press Milton Keynes to take actions for Castlethorpe for which they are responsible. Your council has been very active in this and we have had good results from our positive engagement with them.

1. Highways

I reported in April that our Ward Cllr, Andrew Geary, the Clerk, Peter Haynes and I had met with the MK Cabinet Member for Highways, then Chris Williams, and the senior Director, Pele Bhamber. The Parish Council maintains a list of outstanding Highways works many of which were outstanding for over 18 months. We obtained commitments from Chris and Pele and followed up with a number of site meetings with other Highways officers, Ian MacGregor and Nick Wood.

As a result, a number of works have been completed especially the new parking area and drainage scheme in Station Road. We also believe that our positive engagement resulted in the resurfacing in The Chequers and North Street and the surface dressing in Station Road. These areas are much improved. Drainage works in Bullington End Road are expected shortly.

We continue to press for improved drainage schemes in the allotments access onto Bullington End Road and in the garage area in The Chequers. Bullington End Road is now the area in most need of resurfacing but this certainly won't be until the 2010/11 financial year. In the meantime, the Parish Council is pressing for the overhead lines to be buried before the resurfacing.

We have also pressed MKC vigorously to add further signage and reflectors on the new traffic calming and also to conduct a safety audit which has been done though we are aware of continuing complaints about the sight-lines approaching the Hanslope Road traffic calming. We have also pressed MKC, and withheld the final payment for the traffic calming, until the repairs to the islands were completed.

Bert Tapp and I represent the parish at the Hanslope Park Area Forum and through that, with Hanslope and Haversham and our Ward Councillor, we have been pressing for a drainage improvement scheme at the Devil's Dip and we await a consultant's report.

We have also used that Forum and engaged with our MP, Mark Lancaster, to get improvements at the A508 / Yardley Road junction. This is an NCC responsibility and they have been reluctant to act. However, they did agree to use planning gain from the new marina at The Navigation to fund a study and we have chased them again now that the work is nearly complete and the NCC Highways officer is obtaining the funding from their Planning Department. I stress this is just for

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the study and I think we have probably now missed the budget for 2010/11 so we must aim for 2011/12.

2. Public Transport

Bert Tapp and I have placed considerable but constructive pressure on MKC both directly and through the Hanslope Park Forum to improve our bus service. A new, improved timetable was introduced in June with an 1830 return service from the City Centre. It is important that we use these services – I do personally – or we will lose them again. We are pressing for a through service to the hospital and improved service on Saturdays.

Grass-cutting was much improved over 2008 and we were particularly pleased with cutting immediately before the Open Gardens event. However, there is still more progress which we will seek next year.

Village Website & Parish Plan.

The website is being well used both by visitors and residents. Thanks to Peter Haynes for acting as webmaster. Please let him know of any events so that they can be publicised there. It does attract visitors – I was talking to two strangers at a cricket match and found they had searched for a local match and found our website and come to the game.

We are making good progress on the actions identified in Parish Plan which was completed at the end of last year. The Plan has been instrumental in influencing MKC on a range of issues from Planning to Highways and also in obtaining the various grants we have received from MKCF and WREN.

I would like to see an annual review of the Plan perhaps at the beginning of 2010 so that all those residents who gave their time can look at progress and give their feedback to the parish council.

One of the joys of the laws governing Parish Councils is that, while Councillors make decisions, we aren't meant to do anything! The doing is done by our officers, in our case our Clerk. We are very lucky to have Karen as Clerk and she has put a tremendous amount of personal effort into making sure that the many projects which we have done over the past 6 months, especially the WREN grant application, have been a success and I would like to close by expressing our appreciation for her work.

Philip Ayles

Chairman, Castlethorpe Parish Council