

Chairman's report

19 May 2008 - 18 May 2009

I'd like to welcome everyone to this 115th Annual Parish Meeting.

As the *Parish* Meeting, this is a key meeting for the parish residents to challenge the Council on its decisions and how wisely (or otherwise) it is spending their money. At a time when the proper spending of public money is high on the agenda, the openness of Parish governance to scrutiny and question is perhaps unique!

It falls to me to report on the last year. As always, there is a more detailed report from our committees which I would recommend - it should be on the website soon, and is available from the Clerk.

Orchard Park Parish has to be **the** big item from the year. Arbury Park, now Orchard Park, started for the Council some 7½ years ago. The new Parish *should* have been in place a year ago, we thought it *might* have been there 6 months ago - but it is now. Until next month our District Councillors are doing sterling work as Interim Community (it's a Community, not a Parish Council) Councillors. However, in June, they will have a new Council of residents and be in real control of their own community - its resources as well as its forward development. We wish them well.

Orchard Park has taken some of the land that was Impington from south of the A14. They are responsible for the homes in the Minerva Way anomaly. In 1894 when the Parish boundary was originally drawn it made sense - but half a dozen homes in the road in South Cambs and the rest in Cambridge City doesn't now! Cambridge City and South Cambs plan to press on with their boundary review. Precisely when that will happen, and when it will be implemented are unknowns. It is likely, though, that the southern boundary of Impington will be the A14 within the life of this Council or next.

That brings us to "NIAB Extra". The Government is obsessed with housing *numbers*. We've got to hit targets. And the Inspectors dealing with the District Plan (LDF) don't think that there is enough land allocated to housing. Even if the whole District were allocated to housing we wouldn't hit the targets they want in today's economic climate, of course! But they still want more. That no-one, ourselves, adjacent Parish Councils, the District Council, our local MPs - among others - agree that this is right seems not to matter one iota.

So, more land is to be allocated. One major area is "NIAB extra" - that's the land to the west of the B1049 just south of the A14. It's in Impington - at the moment. If it gets built, it'll be part of a solid block of housing from Huntingdon Road to the A14 - and should be in Cambridge.

Our largest *local* development is the former Unwins site and the first planning application for it has been passed - but only for part of the site. We expect another - perhaps for the whole of the site. As a result we have our own hill - used by BMXers - at their own risk, of course, and if we get some snow perhaps as a ski jump? Whatever, it's an eyesore - and moving on must now be the priority.

A recent decision of South Cambs Planning Committee deserves some comment. Council wants to get more affordable housing for local residents. There's 30% affordable in Orchard Park - completed whilst part of Impington (and perhaps more to come). Northstowe should be 40% affordable. And any development now has to provide affordable homes. South Cambs has clear policies about where those homes should be - they should be part of the community - not on a distant edge. They should also be close enough to local facilities so that there's no need to use cars.

A plan came in for affordable homes in the Green Belt (there is a policy for this - an "Exception Site") - but very much on the edge of the community behind St George's Court. That's some way from shops, schools and even the nearest bus stop - and along a narrow footpath. Its design and layout wasn't great - and it didn't fit with policy. For those reasons we objected - and District Councillors agreed with that objection.

I cannot ignore Northstowe - we continue to work on issues (such as HGV traffic, drainage) that will arise from the Northstowe development. However, the Housing and Communities Agency (a Government branch) and Gallaghers are yet to find a way forward. HCA may even buy out Gallaghers - which could be a very interesting move. Whatever, every day's delay drives back the date when work will start - and homes will be ready. It will be a long time before people will be living there - or getting on the Guided Bus there.

However, the Guided Bus will be up and running (at least north of Cambridge) before the end of the year. We don't know precisely when - but it should all be done and dusted before Christmas - including the maintenance track/cycle path. The latter will be good news for a lot of people - particularly those wanting to get down to the Science Park or CRC. For those wanting to travel north the Guided Bus may be a good option, but it will make little difference otherwise to residents. What is needed now is for the final issues about noise barriers to be sorted for Villa Road/Villa Place and the system to be up and working.

Noise barriers also come up when we're looking at the A14 and its forthcoming widening. We're working with neighbouring Parishes (Girton, Histon) on noise - and finding relevant experts who can support the case for better noise protection than has been suggested to date. And we're working with a whole number of Parishes and County/District about the likely HGV traffic, and how that will be managed. Drainage

will be a final concern - and we hope to be able to call on the support of our local expert - Cllr Mason!

On traffic there are two final matters. There's at last a glimmer of light and hope that something will be done about the speed limit on the B1049. Its many years since the Council first asked County to review it - and now that is happening. Given the number of traffic lights and pedestrian crossings along it dropping the limit will make little difference to the time to get out of the village - and every drop in speed gives more time to avoid accidents and reduces the severity of injuries.

Again we have to commiserate with Histon Football Club - a great season, and wonderful achievement in getting to the play-offs but foiled at the last. With that success comes visiting teams with lots of supporters - and cars - and next year that will include Luton! New Road is too narrow to cope - and is a bus route (and route for Police cars as well). We continue to meet with HFC Directors, and have made a proposal based on advice from County that could help. We await a decision.

Councillors continue to attend the regular Neighbourhood Panel meetings. These have focussed on policing matters, but are being widened to include County & District issues. There's some sense in this - in many cases (particularly ASB) action is needed by other bodies to make a permanent fix. As with many areas there was a rise in burglary and theft earlier in the year - thought by many to be a result of the recession. That seems to be now under control. We will continue to work with the policing team, who are making increasing efforts to be visible in the community.

A blow to keeping everyone in touch with what's happening was the loss of the Crier in September of last year. Many local newspapers are going under - it is perhaps indicative of how much advertising from estate agents (and others) have helped to cover their costs. We are fortunate to still have the Cambridge News, but a team of residents is now planning to launch our own free monthly paper. It will parallel a website - hiccourier.com - and we have committed to support it and this will replace our own newsletter.

At almost the same time we lost Impington Post Office. Again, this was a numbers game - effectively proved when one of the first group of POs under threat was saved - another was immediately chosen for closure. We tried, of course, as did many others - but never had a chance. We applaud the owners for the efforts they have made to keep a retail presence - as with so many of our local businesses it is a case of *use it or lose it*.

We also got involved in the debate on Foundation status for IVC. It seems that many, if not all, of our secondary schools will be seeking Foundation status. We have struggled to work out what difference this will really make, but recognise that this is a move that the school management and Governors really want to make.

A success, late in the year, must be the Greening Campaign run by HICCA. As a Council we are working with HICCA (one of their team has been co-opted to our Environment Committee) and this campaign, asking residents to make just simple changes to their lives, has shown over 400 households prepared to do that, and also to announce that they have. They will have made CO₂ savings, and also real *cash* savings by those changes. We look forward to the next stage, helping residents to take bigger steps to save more CO₂, and more money.

I always try to take a look to the future - though much of that will always be “business as usual” - and looking to finish things that are currently ongoing - such as Northstowe, A14 widening, NIAB et al.

Money - the work of the Council is, of course, supported by your (and my) contribution through Council Tax. This year we deliberately chose to hold that contribution at the same level as last year. We are increasingly conscious, though, that we may be asked to cover the costs of works that ought to be covered by County or District. Roadworks - yellow lines, signage, even speed limits are possible examples. We always think long and hard before making these investments for the community. However, we believe that if it's clear where that money is being spent, and we have consulted the right people, that we are here to make that difference - and we will.

I have spoken about the Parish Plan before - and we really do hope to get this off the ground this year. It needs a lead from Councillors - but also your input.

The other area that we are looking at, and must make some progress on, is the station area. We've got a group, working with Histon, looking at the design possibilities for this area. That will include, of course, rebuilding of the gatekeepers hut, but must also look to the challenge of returning some of the suburban if not rural feel of the vast sea of concrete and tarmac that's come with the guideway.

I'll close by thanking Councillors: those who are still with us, and doing such a splendid job, and also those who have left us this year - Phil Gooden & Chris Creasey, Jens Kirschner and Nick Warren from Orchard Park. I hope that the time the Orchard Park team had with us will have helped them in their future roles. I'd also like to thank the Councillors from the rest of the local government family that work for our residents along side us - Cllrs Chatfield, Davies and Mason at District and Bradney and Jenkins at County.

Last but not least I'd like to thank our staff Angela, Lynda, Sarah, Steve, Terry and Trevor - without whom we'd not be able to do anything!

Denis W Payne
18th May 2009