

**Annual Parish Meeting
Histon Parish Council
12th May 2008**



Annual Report 2008-09

Welcome to the 115th Annual Parish Meeting reporting on the first of a new four year term of office due to continue to 2012. The Parish Council is obligated each year to call this meeting and invite all members of the community to attend and ask questions or comment on its past year's work and on future strategy and schemes.

Having lost six Councillors with many years experience between them, in April last year, this year has been one where more experienced Councillors have had to step up to the mark to help our new Councillors bed in. Unfortunately the amount of work the Parish Council is expected to get through continues to increase and the number of new bodies created by local and national government, which require our response seems to grow exponentially. I thank our new Councillors for willingly having thrown themselves into the deep end from the very start.

During the year, four Parish Councillors: Colin Rose, Ian Levitt, Joan Hart and Kathleen Hemmingway have resigned and I wish to place on record our thanks for the work that they have done on behalf of the community. Especially to Colin and Ian who served with distinction on the Planning Committee during the previous five year term of office.

A number of major items are ongoing, including the widening of the A14 to four lanes between Histon & Impington and Girton. We are now, with Girton, focusing on the levels of noise and pollution the upgrade will cause and expect to seek professional help in arguing our case. We expect a planning application will be presented for this later this year as the Government has now given approval in outline for the scheme between the A1 Junction and Fen Ditton.

The plans for the new town of Northstowe have become a victim of the recent lack of funding caused by the collapse of the banking system. The Homes and Community Agency, formerly English Partnerships and joint developer of the site with Gallaghers, has approached the Government to see whether it is prepared to loan the monies required to put in place the infrastructure required to kick start the development. We are told that the decision will be made this month. Until

then, naturally, there is a reluctance to continue to put in the same level of commitment to debate and resolve the issues that need to be decided. I would like to thank Councillors Jones and Cleaver especially who have put in countless hours ensuring that our village's interests are not forgotten with regard to this development, that will affect our lives for many years to come.

The University and National Institute of Agricultural Botany's plans to build over the Green Belt between the Huntingdon Road and the A14 have reached a stage where the Government Planning Inspectors are seeking to increase the number of houses proposed. This affects our village through increased traffic at King Hedges Road and drainage issues on our side of the A14. We have submitted objections on this basis.

On a positive front our colleagues at Impington have now divested themselves of responsibility for the new housing development across the A14, formerly known as Arbury Park and now renamed Orchard Park. We commiserate however with our three elected District Councillors who have been forced to take "Parish Council" responsibility for the development until new councillors are elected in June.

Also for mention on the planning front are the stuttering movements towards developing a Parish Plan and the formation of a "Station Area Design" group of interested parties to look at developing a site specific plan for the site now the Guided Bus Station is close to completion. I note that on last year's report I optimistically predicted that Anglian Water had agreed to review the problems with the sewerage system in our villages by the autumn. Unfortunately, though, the problems continue and the Utility and our District Council seem unwilling to deal with the issue. It may be that Anglian Water, a public company dedicated to making profits sees service to our community as a distraction.

The Local Development Framework (LDF) that will guide planning policies over the next decade is still evolving. "Yes, I said that last year as well." We have recently picked up that they will be reviewing our conservations areas later this year. The District Council are also *still* due to propose locations for new gypsy and travellers sites in the District, although the Regional Planning Guidance for this has at last caught up and been recently published. We (still) await the proposals for Histon & Impington with interest.

I note in passing that the "Unwin" site was cleared for a change of use to housing, despite the villages being a Rural Growth Settlement *and* a well argued case for retaining the current use by the two Parish Councils. The District Council arguing that there is enough commercial sites in the area to satisfy future demands. I would like to thank anew councillor, David Thurman, for agreeing to chair the Planning Committee, which is probably the one that interfaces most with the public and coping with a baptism of fire having to put our case to the District Council's Planning Committee in person three times in the past few months. I would also like to thank Councillor Eade for his work as Trees and Allotments Officer, as well as the expertise he brings on buildings in the area.

The Highways and Transport committee has joined with Impington in requesting a lorry parking ban in certain parts of the two villages. We expect that to be put in place in the latter half of the year. Also with Impington, we commissioned a traffic survey of the two villages in September. The week chosen was fine, clear and there were no traffic incidents on the A14 during the whole time the survey was conducted! The information has already been used as part of a submission on the potential effect of the NIAB development on Histon Road traffic. Following on from our discussions with groups in the villages, that want the lowering of speed limits from 40 to 30 on the B1049 and 30 to 20 elsewhere in the villages, the

group recently presented a petition signed by 143 residents to the Highways Area Joint Action Group. It is not yet clear whether the Area Joint Committee regards that as a representative body of opinion throughout the two villages, although they have expressed their tacit support for the proposals. In view of the recent Police comments about being unable to police 20mph limits and a number of residents expressing their opposition to this proposal, we can expect to see further interest in this over the next few months.

The Guided Busway through our villages seems to be nearly complete, with only the issue of noise barriers yet to be resolved with local residents. The planning application for these has been recently submitted to the District Council for approval. It is not yet certain when the service will start, we have seen so many dates come and go, although the latest prognosis is "late summer". One day the issues that the villages have had to suffer in furtherance of this venture will presumably just become recollected memories over a pint of ale at the local hostelry. Looking further to the future, the Highways Committee is now liaising with the County Council Highways department to move forward our proposals to provide a safer crossing point in the High Street between the Co-op and the Building Society. The proposals include widening the pavement in Station Road at the Co-op to also provide a safer crossing point to the Boot. The Parish Council has put aside money to pay for this, as the County Council is as usual pleading poverty for such schemes. We welcome the input that Impington Parish Council puts into this Committee, as it does not have a separate committee dealing with these issues itself and most issues affect both Parishes together. I would also like to thank Councillor Foster for chairing this committee and for dealing with our friends at the County Council with a smile.

Our Environment committee under its chairman, John Emmines, has achieved a lot this year. Accepting my challenges of last year, the Christmas lights were finished and the bollards installed on the Green. The Brook was given its, what was supposed to be, annual haircut in January and we need to thank the Scouts and the Village Environment group as well as Councillors for pitching in. Not forgetting the food provide by the Clerk and her husband. Unfortunately, the lights could not remain on all over the Christmas period, despite the gallant efforts of Councillor Stonham, due to some issues with vandals and electrical supply. I am promised that this will be sorted out for Christmas 2009, although we have no control over the tiny minority that thinks spoiling everyone else's Christmas is fun. I should also like to thank the Feast Committee for their splendid tree, which unfortunately also suffered some damage whilst lit. The bollards have also had their moments, having lost four to-date courtesy of the Co-op delivery drivers, who obviously have not passed the reversing test on their HGV licences or else are practicing for a ten-pin bowling championship.

The Parish Council, listening to other complaints over recent years, has taken the decision to become responsible for cutting the grass itself in the designated public areas that were the responsibility of the County Council. As a result, the grass will be cut more frequently and we hope improve the village environment. The cost is partly subsidised by the County. I should mention also here that we continue to work with Premier Foods to vanquish the odours that have caused problems for local residents.

In addition the roundabout in the playground on the Green has been totally refurbished after being dismantled piece by piece as well as been set on fire by a group that use the playground in the evenings for nefarious activities including underage drinking and drug taking. We once again ask residents to be vigilant

and report such activities as well as seeking with the Police to reduce the amount of alcohol that is purchased in local shops by minors.

We are still committed to updating the under five play equipment on the Green, however other priorities in the use of Parish funds this year has meant that this has been put back a year. Councillors Thurman and Foster have kept a watching brief on our footpaths as well as working with the local area highways engineer to deal with problems with the local roads and the footpaths. The current list is fairly long, though due to their diligence and persistence is probably shorter than it might have been. I also should mention here the sterling work carried out by the volunteers of the Environment Group in both villages under the leadership of Pene Nudds. Another local group, HICCA, has also been successfully pushing forward a local "Greening" campaign and are currently looking to get funding from the District Council for helping residents who wish to "go green" or save on their energy costs.

The Finance & Legal Committee continues to deal with all the "backroom" functions that are necessary to keep a Parish Council running. Special thanks to Councillors Plumbly and Thurman for bringing their outside knowledge and experience and a fresh approach to bear on the issues; to Councillor Emminees for all his Health & Safety and Risk assessment work and for Councillor Davies for continuing to provide his experience to this difficult job. The Council spent just over £106,000 in the year and has precepted for £138,000 for the coming one, a 3% increase on the current year. The increase covers a much higher percentage of joint expenditure with Impington Parish Council, as a result of the divestment of Orchard Park, as well as our commitment to grass cutting above. We have targeted pushing our financial planning cycle out to three years in the future and the work to review our local byelaws, with Impington, also needs completing this year. Finally, the issue of who will take responsibility for the High Street Car Park is back on the agenda as the District Council seeks to devolve its responsibility in this areas.

I wrote at length last year about anti-social behaviour and the Police and I am pleased to say that things have dramatically improved this year. We continue to attend the local Police Forum meetings and it appears that our plea for attendance at our Parish Council meetings on at least a quarterly basis has been heard. The turnover of PCSO's continues to be high and an area of concern, however the quality also remains high.

The Recreation Ground Management Committee continues to perform exceptionally well and we are all proud of what it achieves under the chairmanship of Councillor Davies. We are also indebted to Councillor Cleaver and our two new Councillors, Stonham and Newman and to the efforts of our Recreation Clerk Lynda Marsh and her backroom team including Steve Campion, our Groundsman. Notable current issues on their agenda are drainage of the "bottom end" pitches, together with Football Club drainage, replacement of the boundary trees by the Football Club, the refurbishment of the Groundsman's house and looking at the replacement of playground equipment. As our biggest area of expenditure it is a constant battle to keep expenditure down whilst providing much needed facilities for local sports teams. I should also mention here the decision to "outsource" the upkeep of Homefield Park to the "Friends of Homefield Park". We watch with interest how well this delegation to a voluntary group works.

Councillors Cleaver and Jones continue to hold a watching brief on employment issues and the Council took on a part time clerk during the year as well as reviewing the sub-committee system and how often they hold meetings. This is

part of an ongoing review of the role of the administration staff and in particular the Parish Clerk, Angela Young, without whose total dedication much of this work would not get done. Once again she requires our thanks.

In looking forward, we continue, as a Parish Council, to try and persuade Impington Parish Council that both Councils would perform more effectively if we amalgamated. In looking back for this review, I note that we first looked at this in 2003 under the current two chairmen.

Finally, I need to mention the work being carried out by both Councils to look at the possibility of the provision of a new Community Centre for our villages. In concluding this review, I would like to thank the Youth Committee for its commitment to providing facilities for our citizens of tomorrow, to mention the continuing good work carried out by the Mobile Warden Scheme and to thank ex-Councillor Pearl Harris for continuing to represent us with the Day centre and the village Warden scheme. It only remains for me to mention that we are currently short of two Parish Councillors and after listening to all the varied things that the Parish Council gets involved in I am sure there are one or two residents with some time on their hands who cannot wait to get involved.

Max Parish
May 2009