

**Annual Parish Meeting  
Histon Parish Council  
24<sup>th</sup> May 2011**



## **Annual Report 2010-11**

### **118<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting of Histon Parish Council**

The Parish Council is required to hold an Annual Parish Meeting each year and invite members of the community to attend and ask questions or comment on its past year's work and on its future strategy and schemes. This annual report to the residents of Histon on the work of their Parish Council comes as we enter the last of our current four year term of office. Reports on all the council's sub-committees have already been issued, and the annual report of the jointly funded and operated Histon & Impington Recreation Ground Committee is due to be presented on the 6<sup>th</sup> June. I would like to thank all councillors for the (unpaid) time they give in the service of the community, on the diverse issues that affect the Village. In particular, I would like to thank those individual Councillors who chair our sub-committees and the Parish Clerk; Angela Young and her staff for all the work they have put in during the year and who share the burden of trying to run this organisation as effectively as possible.

The Parish Council has precepted an amount of £160,000 for this coming year 2011-12, an increase of just under 11% on the £144,200 for last year. The precepted amount was kept down last year by reviewing reserves levels, an opportunity that could not be repeated for the coming year with the expectation of maintaining the reserve levels currently required by our auditors. Hence, the opportunity to acquire much needed open space land and picking up the additional cost of asset renovations at the Recreation Ground left the Parish Council with the decision to either increase the loan portfolio, its precept, or to continue to cut costs or abort existing agreed projects. Histon Parish Council has loans outstanding with the Public Works Loan Board of £228,529 and repayment and interest costs for these are expected to be £21,390 this year. The possibility of cutting costs of this size, at a time when both County and District Councils are proposing to save money by reducing services and grants, as well as passing costs onto the Parish Councils, was felt to put at risk our ability to afford the services we provide to the community. The option of asking for 15p a week extra

on average from residents was considered a regrettable but reasonable alternative.

The Parish Council does feel however, that the best opportunity to keep costs at this level in the future and continue to provide the excellent services that make our villages desirable places to live in, is to persuade the residents of the two villages and our colleagues on Impington Parish Council that a merged single Parish Council is the best way forward for the community. It offers the prospect of reducing duplication of administration time and of finding cost savings from the synergistic opportunities of single insurance, audit and association fees, as well as joint tendering on third party services such as grass cutting and tree surgery.

The budget for 2011-12 has therefore been set at £160,080, against an actual spend in 2010-11 of £145,721 plus £24,100 of additions to agreed capital project reserves, a total of £169,821. These are to the War memorial repair and restoration fund, Co-op pedestrian crossing fund and the Community Facilities capital fund. Simplistically, the reduction in costs of approximately £9,700 comes mainly from the Community Facilities fund, which is all going this year towards funding the new open spaces provision at the back of Manor Park. However, in more detail, apart from cost increases, the Parish Council has also agreed to put an initial £2,500 towards the provision of an older persons' community liaison officer and a further £5,000 towards improving the play equipment at the Green; the total available for this project, before grant funding now standing at £17,588.

Looking back to last year's report and having to say much the same things again this year shows that the pace of change in local government can grind frustratingly slow at times and that progress can perhaps often only be judged over the period of a life of a council: four years rather than a single year. The High Street Car Park is now solely our responsibility and its inclusion as a justification for there being adequate local parking facilities in two recent major local planning applications brings hope of fulfilling its intended purpose as well as providing free commuter parking for local business employees. However, there appears to be little progress so far on negotiations to obtain a long term lease on the land surrounding the War Memorial site, which belongs to the County Council, with a view to preserving the nature of the area and enhancing it where possible to reflect this heritage monument.

The aim to reduce flyposting around the Village by providing community notice boards nears completion with two out of three now in place, having ironically been delayed by our own incursion into the local planning system for permission to site a board on the Green, as opposed to sticking pins into the nearest tree. The one positive from this experience is it has introduced our new permanent Planning Clerk; Chelsea Presland, to the bureaucracy of providing flood risk assessments, conservation area statements and the like for putting two posts in the ground next to the footpaths board.

Our planning sub-committee has received 65 planning applications or amendments during the year to comment on for the District Council. This activity continues to consume a large proportion of our time and despite disagreeing with the decisions made on a significant number of applications, the activity does allow a chance to question the impact of developments on the neighbourhood and in particular on the proliferation of "on street" parking. We will also be looking

closely with Impington Council on the proposals by developers to change the majority of the remaining zoned industrial and retail land into housing stock, following upon the loss of the Unwin's site for this purpose. Much as additional housing builds may be required in the region, the District Council's decision to identify the villages as a Rural Development Centre in its Local Development Framework, because of its existing facilities, it cannot then choose to turn them into commuter villages by removing opportunities for bringing businesses into the community, especially given the inherent advantages of locating them alongside the Guided Busway.

This brings me onto Highways issues, where, apart from trying to guess when the Guided Busway service will eventually start, we continue to monitor the outstanding issues of landscaping and provision of noise barriers at the St. Audrey's Close crossing point. The new 30 mph speed limit on the B1049 is taking some getting used to for a lot of motorists and the welcome enhancement of the cycleway along it has been tempered by the number of problems it has so far engendered in its construction. The Parish Council is working with the County to try and solve the Ambrose Way issues created by the new road markings and prevent an accident black spot from developing. With no news on the A14 widening in view, the proposals to carry out environmental noise testing in the most sensitive areas has temporarily been put on hold. Continuing on the theme of the A14, whilst pressing for a long term solution to the problems of crossing the A14 for cyclists, it was agreed between the District, County and local councils over a year ago that we should be looking for an interim solution with the Highways Agency of provision of pelican crossings. A meeting is scheduled apparently between County and the Highways Agency this week. A number of requests from residents for additional road signs in their locality, potentially conflicts with our general endorsement of the County Council's adopted policy of trying to reduce signage clutter. Nevertheless, the lack of funds for any local traffic initiative means any agreed costs will have to fall directly onto the local community. A case in point is the request from the Parish Council to remove one of the allotted parking spaces alongside the Green, opposite the Co-op, to help in preventing the absurd number of times lorries have knocked over the posts on the adjacent pavement in their manoeuvrings to exit the premises. The three month public notice consultation period co-incided with the decision to resurface and repaint the parking spaces, so that it unfortunately could not be carried out at that time. The County Council has now demanded £700 to black out eight 9-inch white lines and repaint half of them, as well requesting a £250 notice fee.

Also, the salt bins ordered from the County Council for use by the Parish Council have never materialised and therefore any review of any potential wider provision of these within the community has not yet taken place. Given that any salt required would be provisioned and paid for by the Parish Council. The new Government has made statements about limiting any liability for local groups utilising the salt to prevent accidents on icy pavements but, like a lot of things, nothing concrete has been received yet.

Finally on the highways front, no real progress has been made on the proposed crossing at the Co-op, despite the Parish Council having reserved funds for its construction. Lack of personnel available at County to progress this is the main

drawback, although we have recently been told that (yet another) safety audit, that is a prerequisite, will be carried out “when workload allows”.

The Council has made donations to the following organisations operating in the locality during the year: Histon Day Centre £150; County Council Summer Library reading Scheme £100; British Legion Wreath and poppy appeal £40; Shrievally Trust £100 (They operate the Cambridgeshire “bobby” scheme, which provides a free service to victims of burglary aged 65 or more who live in the county. It also helps many older people who are not yet victims but who are at high risk or feel vulnerable, for which a fee of £20 towards its costs is requested.)

The Mobile Warden scheme was granted £750 under the special projects category and there is continuing uncertainty over provision of future funds for this scheme, currently operated by Age UK, from the other tiers of local government.. Similarly, the Parish Council gave £4,710 to the Histon & Impington Youth Committee, (£6,846 in 2009-10) to enable them to carry out and fund youth projects in the village. A request for an increase to £8,066 in 2011-12 is noted.

Planning for the new community of Northstowe has perhaps inevitably drifted due to a change of government and a lack of funding for the infrastructure costs and the A14 upgrade. Apart from re-inventing itself yet again as an “eco town” to attract available funding, the majority of activity this year has been on reviewing the traffic figures and building timelines to try and kick start it. The Parish Council notes the recent retirement of Peter Studdert, who was responsible for co-ordinating the local government review of the new town. We are grateful for his attempts to involve the local Parish Councils and to accommodate our concerns early in the planning process and hope that his successor will continue in this vein. On the other side of the A14, full planning permission for a new access point for the NIAB housing development, opposite King Hedges Road, was granted, despite our concerns on its impact on local traffic on the B1049 and before they announced the proposal to construct a major supermarket on the development.

On a more positive front, the Parish Council was awarded Quality Council status this year, part of which relies on the publishing of our activities in the HI Courier. I would like to thank all those who make this publication possible, from contributors and editors to those that deliver it to our doorstep. It relies heavily on advertisers and in these increasingly straightened times needs our support.

The vision of an older persons’ support co-ordinator for the two villages is in the process of being realised, with initial financial support coming from the two Parish Councils, the Church and the local Histon Poores’ land Charity.

In addition, the Parish Council hopes finally to commence the second stage of the Brook enhancement scheme on the Village Green, although there are still concerns over the proliferation of rats, caused by the overfeeding of the duck population by residents.

Our Environment Committee have also agreed to work with the management of Etheldred House in Clay Street to landscape part of the boundary and adjacent footpath for the enjoyment of local residents. I note also at this point that the

apparent indiscriminate removal of trees in the villages and the arguments accepted, if any, for this to take place, continues to put us frequently at odds with the planning regime at the District Council.

The Community Facilities group continues to meet to pursue the goal of enhancing the provision of community services within the two villages. I note that with that the St. Andrews Church Hall project having now obtained planning permission and the Methodist Church also in the process of seeking planning permission to enlarge its communal cafeteria space, not forgetting the recently refurbished Baptist Church facilities, our local churches currently lead the way in the provision of community amenities together with the Village College. Of course, our own Recreation Ground continues to play an expanding role in this area as well. Our management committee works tirelessly to provide opportunities for residents of all ages to keep active, to which I would add our thanks to the Recreation Ground Manager; Lynda Marsh and the Groundsman; Steve Campin and his staff. The latest brainchild being to obtain funding for an outdoor gym that opened this month. The playground continues to invite superlatives and its success can be measured not least by the number of parents from outside the villages whose offspring stop and use it on the way to and from Cambridge. I read recently that Westminster Council is to start charging for the use of its play facilities within Battersea Park because of the high number of children who use it from outside the Borough, though I am sure that this Council will not attempt to follow their lead.

It is difficult to provide more than a summary in a report like this, so I do urge residents to read the individual sub-committee reports, as well as the monthly minutes to get a complete picture of the activities that your Parish Council get involved in on your behalf. They are also available on the Councils' Joint website. Looking forward, I hope that some of the projects that this Council has started and mentioned above maybe completed before the end of this Council's term of office next year. Finally, to those of you who are not yet councillors and believe that you can contribute something to enhance your community, or even to keep it a place that is desirable to live in, we have just identified an opportunity for someone to be co-opted onto the council for just under a year, a perfect opportunity to try it out without having to give any long term commitment before a new council is elected in May 2012.

Max Parish  
Chairman  
May 2011