

Impington Council – Annual Report



Welcome to this first issue of Council Reports.

We intend to publish a report three or four times a year to keep you in touch with what we're up to, the latest news, and plans for the future. Copies will be available from the Library, Parish Office, and from locations around the village. It will also be on the Internet.

This report, our Annual Report, is a summary of last year, our finances, and plans for the coming year.

What did we do last year?

Each year, our Chairman (Denis Payne) gives a report to the Annual Parish Meeting on the year's activities – this isn't every detail, but it covers the major events. Its reproduced here in full:

"I'd like to welcome everyone to this 111th Annual Parish Meeting. The Annual Parish Meeting is a unique feature in Local Government. It is only at the Parish level that electors are invited to a meeting of this nature and have the right to raise any question or issue that you wish.

Of course, regulations such as the Freedom of Information Act, and the Councillors' Code of Conduct apply to us as for other Councils. I hope though that we run our Council in such a manner that we operate in the best interests of all without the need to the recourses available in these Acts and elsewhere.

In preparing my report, I always look back at last year's - and hope that we will have moved on, that issues will have been completed so that we can look to fresh items where we can make a difference. Of course we have moved on this year - but there are a depressing number of issues that aren't resolved.

Planning is one area where some of the hard work by a small number of people is both vitally important, but also largely invisible. In this respect the Local Development Framework (LDF) is a key example. Residents have been rightly concerned about 100 extra houses that might be built on the Unwins site - but the LDF contains bids for development that could add in excess of 1,000 homes to Impington - and more in Histon. A joint response from the two Parishes was submitted, arguing strongly that we are "full". Thankfully, SCDC did not support any of the more outrageous development ideas - but there are still battles to be fought. And worse still, there will be another round of consultation - giving developers another chance to enter their bids.

Similarly, the work on Arbury Camps (the land on the other side of the A14), primarily on the agreement covering provision of local facilities, has occupied much time. Unfortunately, the minority developer for the site has held up signature of this document. Some work has been done - in a very destructive manner - on hedges - but when building will start is unclear. We hope, of course, that it will become a separate Parish, looking to its own needs - but will be a load on us until then.

More visibly the Mill Road application is still unresolved. Permission has been granted but there are issues still to be resolved. Some see the approval as being a victory for common sense, but others see backland development of the wrong mix of properties, the demolition of perfectly good homes and a potential increase in problems arising from inadequate services as a disaster.

Most recently, an outline bid for development at the Unwins site (and beyond) raise some interesting challenges. Some Councillors were "coded out" (see Code of Conduct article) - and couldn't get involved. There were issues about the level of consultation by SCDC, but we are still hopeful of refusal. However, delays at Arbury Camps, and Northstowe, are leading some SCDC officers to look at sites such as Unwins to help the Council meet its development targets. We still have work to do!

Traffic and transport have been another major theme for this year. The Guided Bus Inquiry occupied a team of local residents, largely from Histon. We have to thank Councillor Mason for sterling work here, but also local experts Mike Stigwood and Dr Iain Dupère, as well as RAGBUS and individuals. Some key evi-

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Contacts

www.impington.net

Clerk: Mrs A J Young
The Parish Office
Recreation Ground
New Road, Impington
Cambridge CB4 9LU

Telephone/fax:
01223 235906

Email:
clerk@hisimp.freeserve.co.uk

Chairman D W Payne
Impington Lane 233577

Vice-Chairman J Teague
Milton Road 561861

Councillors

H S Abdullah
South Road 235989

P D Gooden
Impington Lane 515823

M Lawton
Pepys Terrace 511351

P Nudds
Clay Close Lane 237155

T W Silk
The Crescent 560633

D Starling
Mill Lane 233455

S Unwin
Mill Road 235334

G B Waters
Cambridge Road 560712

M J Withers
Highfield Road 527719

Cambridgeshire Direct
(County & District Calls)
0845 045 5200

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dence was discovered after the Inquiry closed by use of the Fol Act, so this will run and run for some time yet.

Traffic calming - I could write a whole report on this subject. We were given a "once in a lifetime" offer of money given our proximity to the A14. Every other village has welcomed that with open arms - less so here, and a lot of effort was put into consultation and communication.

Councillors spent many meetings reviewing all of the comments received, taking a balanced and overall view - and the scheme is now being implemented. It will take time to settle down, of course - and we know that some people have real concerns at the moment. Later in the year we will be reviewing its impact, and the feedback we've had, with our colleagues from Histon. We can already see some minor problems that will need to be raised with the County Council for resolution, more will have to wait the results of that review. The scheme, of course, makes an impact on all of us. However, slowing those who disregard speed limits is vitally important - we've had few accidents but if we've saved one accident, one life even, in the future I for one welcome it.

And now, of course, consultation on the A14 widening is restarting. Those living close to the current road have been seeking solutions to the noise problem for years - ever since the road first opened and took vastly more traffic than forecast. We need to work to ensure that they, and the rest of us, can sleep more easily with reduced noise levels. Visual impact is something that many would also wish to see improved.

On the development front the Recreation Ground/Pavilion works continue to move forward. The "Friends of the Rec" continue to put in tremendous efforts, and have well demonstrated that the Rec is a resource for far more than just football and cricket! The Development Sub Committee continues to find additional sources of funding, but quotes have come in significantly above expectations - leaving real questions. Can we afford it? Can we afford not to do it? Our thanks to Steve Unwin, Mark Lawson, the Histon Councillors and the sports clubs representatives for all their hard work to date - and in the future!

Regrettably the success at the Rec has not been matched at the Church Halls. Notwithstanding the efforts of the team there, they haven't found the same level of support from the community, and have closed down the project. There is still an excellent design, and business plan - but it may be that we'll lose what appears to be our only opportunity for a community centre. Our thanks go to Hooda Abdullah and the rest of the team for their efforts.

Late in 2004 we were hit with Cadbury Schweppes selling off the remaining land that they held in the village from when they took over Chivers. The fact that this was the result of a review arising from our request to buy the Rec didn't help at all! The land, comprising the freehold of the Rec, the Copse, and land at Clay Close Lane and South Road was put up for sale by Bidwells, and we had little time to react or plan.

In the end we resolved to bid at the guide price for the Copse, and for the Rec freehold with Histon. Some residents sought to buy the land at South Road but were outbid by land speculators. Similarly, Clay Close Land was bought by a business called PropertySpy - who sell plots

on to the public - who in turn hope to profit when (we would say if) the land is sold for development. A similar approach has been taken with the South Road land - and we have learnt about Article 4 designations, and just how much people are prepared to pay for Green Belt land that is truly unlikely to come forward for development. Particularly fraught was Clay Close Lane, since the manner in which works were done raised real concerns about the possibility of travellers taking over the site. Councillors Gooden and Mason called in SCDC officers, and matters were eventually resolved - but all concerned were considerably unsettled!

Of course, it's been "business as usual" as well, and the AGM will receive reports from Council Committees and groups that we are helping to fund. To pick a few highlights:

- our Joint Youth Committee has had considerable success in raising funds, and doing great works down at the Church Halls for our young people;
- the Environment Committee continues to look after grass, trees, daffodils, bins etc. and work with County on roads, footpaths etc.;
- we continue to work with our colleagues from Histon, who also continue to ask about merger. We have declined to discuss that - but are nevertheless looking at ways to further improve our working together;
- we have decided to take the steps to be in a position to apply for Quality Council status;
- we strive to publicise the work of the Council, via Crier, web site, e-mail lists and talking to groups and residents wherever and whenever we can;
- we're working at the Burial Ground to make more land available, improve working conditions for the groundsman, and improve access to the allotments.

I'd like to close with thanks to a range of people. I've mentioned a number already but must not forget my fellow Councillors - nor our staff - Angela, Lynda, Terry and Steve and Trevor at the Rec - without whom we'd not be able to do anything.

Thanks also to Phil Gooden, who stood down from the County Council - we look forward to working with the new Councillors - David Jenkins and Matthew Bradney.

I'd also like to congratulate Histon FC for winning the division championship - and thank them with their assistance to the fund raising efforts for the Rec.

And last but not least, the wide range of people who do work in our community, unasked, often unnoticed, but much appreciated nevertheless."

Becoming a Councillor

Council elections next take place in 2008, but occasionally a vacancy occurs - someone moves away, changes job or resigns for any number of other reasons and the Council then has to fill that vacancy. Often that is by co-optation (if no election is called) from one or more volunteers.

The role is completely unpaid, at times a lot of work, but has a real chance of making a difference for our Parish. If you might be interested, please let the Parish Clerk know and we'll inform you of any vacancies that happen.

Income, spending

Income

The Council, as with County, District, Fire and Police issues an annual request for funds from Council Tax. This is collected by the District Council and passed on to use on Parish expenses. This year our planned spending is as follows:

Recreation Ground	£30,683
Administration	£15,030
Environment	£11,590
Play Areas	£1,065
Burial Ground	£7,000
Donations	£650
Village Warden Scheme, Church Wall	£2,000
Youth Work	£5,162
Copse Purchase	£15,800

We are planning to spend some of our reserves, particularly on the purchase of the Copse, and so have asked for £72,000 from Council Tax (this is called the precept). This is a rise of just under 3%.

Spending

Our spending each year is reported to the Annual Parish meeting, and it goes through two audit processes, once by our internal auditor who does an initial set of checks not only on the sums, but also on how the Council is working. The accounts are finally checked by external auditors (Moore Stevens) who audit all Parish Accounts in South Cambridgeshire.

Recreation Ground	£25,472
Administration	£12,197
Environment	£5,203
Burial Ground	£6,742
Donations	£638
Village Warden Scheme, Church Wall	£1,500
Youth Work	£4,196

At the end of 2004/05 our reserves were:

Money arising from developments, where the Council solely uses the interest	£19,064
Money set aside for specific purposes (eg Church Halls, Youth work, Copse purchase etc)	£62,217
General Reserve	£31,846

Our auditors require us to keep at least 50% of our precept (ie 50% of £72,000, which is £36,000) in general reserves.

Forthcoming Council Meetings

Council meets at 7:30pm in the Church Hall, St Andrew's. Our next meetings will be on: July 18th, September 19th, October 17th and November 21st.

Meetings are open to all. The agenda has a time for questions.

Committees meet as required. If a particular topic is of interest, please contact the Parish Clerk about getting it heard.

Tasks for 2005-06

A number of things were underway at the end of last year, and we will be taking these forward:

- purchase of the Copse, attempting to come to agreement with the Football Club over public access to the remainder of it;
- purchase of the freehold of the Recreation Ground;
- completing the tree works in the Copse;
- traffic calming works – continuing to listen to **all** comments about the scheme, working with County Council on Phase 2, reviewing details of Phase 1, signage etc.;
- Arbury Camps – working on the planning details, looking to the options for the future governance (eg a separate Parish Council).

We'll continue to take part in consultations from County, District and elsewhere, we know about:

- the Local Development Framework – we will continue to argue that Histon & Impington are full;
- A14 widening – seeking guarantees about noise, air quality, and seeking to ensure that traffic from the A14 does not prevent residents getting out of the village.

Making a difference:

- if funding issues can be sorted, supporting the redevelopment at the Recreation Ground;
- continuing to develop youth work.

Keeping in touch, via:

- newsletters;
- reports to the Histon & Impington Crier;
- Feast Market;
- website, electronic newsletter;
- Parish Office.

Supporting residents:

- on planning matters;
- in their dealings with County & District Councils;
- via support to local groups.

Stop Press

June 23rd - Purchase of main part of Copse completed by Impington, purchase of freehold of the Recreation Ground completed by both Parish Councils.

June 29th - Both Councils agreed to cover the increased funding requirement for the redevelopment of the Pavilion and associated works at the Recreation Ground.

The work is hoped to start in August 2005 and complete in March, 2006.

Feedback

We'd like to know what you think of this newsletter, and the topics raised.

Name:

Address:

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Tel:

E-mail:

The Council would very much like to know what you think of this report:

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Is there anything that you would like to see covered in future reports?

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Daffodils - where would you like to see planting this year?

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And are you able to help? Yes No

Please return to the Parish Office, or any Councillor.

Thank you

Code of Conduct

In the Chairman's report the phrase "coded out" was used – what does this mean?

All Councillors are covered by a Code of Conduct – by law. This code sets clear rules on Councillors' behaviour, and also makes it clear that at some times Councillors must withdraw from meetings.

Councillors are required to register (the register is open to inspection if grounds warrant it) their interests – property ownership, employment, etc. Whenever a matter is being decided by the Council, Councillors are required to consider those interests, and decide whether those interests might be thought to influence their decisions. If they decide that – then they have a "prejudicial interest" and must withdraw from the meeting – in colloquial terms they've been "coded out".

Taking the Unwins application as an example, the Chairman lives opposite the site. Anyone might think that his views could be influenced by that – and therefore he withdrew from the meeting (and all subsequent meetings when it has been discussed!).

The Code of Conduct ensures that, as far as possible, Council decisions are taken in as fair and balanced manner as possible.

If Councillors are thought to have breached the Code, they can be reported to the Standards Board for England. If found to have breached the Code, a range of measures can be taken, including, in the worst case, removal from Council.

Trees

Impington has a lot of trees – and we are lucky to have so many. Those trees (perhaps including yours!) are often covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). If you want to do work on a tree that has a TPO, you need to get permission first from the District Council. (*Note that some tree surgeons will make the necessary arrangements for you.*)

The District Council has an officer who will assess that request, and will also ask the views of the Parish Council. We have a Tree Officer (the role is currently shared) who will look at the tree, and give a local view on the proposed works.

If you need help or advice about trees, and want to know whether yours are covered by TPOs, contact the District Council or Parish Office.

Daffodils

Each year Councillors (often supported by a number of volunteers) plant 100kg of daffodils around the parish. Many have been planted at the entrance to the village from Cambridge on the B1049, but others are off Cambridge Road, Burgoyne's Road and elsewhere.

We will be planning this year's planting in the near future. Where would you like to see this year's daffodils planted? If you'd be willing to help, please do get in touch via the Parish Office.