

**Annual Parish Meeting
Histon Parish Council
14th May 2007**

Annual Report

Welcome to the 113th Annual Parish Meeting and, probably my last annual report to the community concerning the actions and issues that affect this Parish Council and therefore its residents, as Council elections are due to be held in 2008. 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.

During the year two Councillors, who have between them given many years of active community service, retired and I would like to place record my personal thanks to Ann Muncey and Pearl Harris for giving freely of their time to serve this community. We are grateful too for John Emmine and, more recently, Cedric Foster who have stepped into these shoes and will be trying to fill them. It should be noted though that, as a result, our representative balance has lurched decidedly towards a male dominated council. At this stage perhaps, I should also add for completeness that there are a number of Councillors who, like myself, are advancing in years, or getting harder of hearing, who are looking to stand down in May 2008 and take a well earned rest. We therefore need to use this next year to redouble our efforts to look for potential new Councillors who are willing and able to give some of their free time to help this community progress.

It is a constant surprise to me that individuals can be persuaded to stand for elections to the District and County Councils who have absolutely no knowledge of the workings of local government. Consequently, I often hear comments from then elected officials as to what a steep learning curve it is to becoming an effective Councillor and regrettably it is the community that loses out. We need to explain to potential volunteers that becoming a Parish Councillor first, as well as offering a chance to serve the community, allows a lot of this expertise to be acquired in advance.

Histon is represented by 15 Parish Councillors who are normally elected every four years and during this year your Council stepped up its campaign to try and persuade our neighbouring village of Impington that moving towards an amalgamation of the two Councils would save some money on our residents' Council Tax bills, as well as make us both more efficient. After all, we currently share offices, Parish Clerks, a recreation ground, burial ground and Impington contribute towards the upkeep of the War Memorial. We jointly submit comments to the other tiers of local government on planning strategy and the local development framework. We share District and County Councillors and although we sometimes get frustrated at the lack of attendance at our monthly meetings by our County Councillors and those District Councillors who are not also Parish Councillors, it is hard not to feel a modicum of sympathy with those forced to go to both and listen to the same issues being raised at each.

The amount of time Councillors are required to give to the village continues to stretch resources. On the planning front, I would like to thank Councillor Mike Barrett for chairing the fortnightly Planning sub-committee meetings. As well as dealing with extensions, conservatories and infill housing, our new designation, with Impington, of Rural Growth Centre is attracting larger potential

developments. The Council will however continue to oppose development that adds to the already chronic infrastructure deficit. Unfortunately, against this, the new retirement development that Bovis has permission to build in Kay Hitch Way has just received additional planning permission from the District Council to link into the Anglian Water sewage system. The system in this area is already overloaded, but our planners seem unable to say "no" when there is patently a real problem. Who says the planning system is slanted against developers? We have also had long running problems with the Excelcare development in Clay Street over building traffic access, noise, drainage and disturbance in this residential neighbourhood. We have promised residents that we will try and learn from this and ensure that future developments of this type have adequate safeguards enshrined in their planning permission conditions to prevent a repeat performance.

The committee has also recently put together a review of affordable or low cost housing development within the village boundaries, as a result of representations from a local housing association. We will continue to find, as a Parish Council, difficulty in rationalising opposition to building within our own local Green Belt area whilst understanding that this is normally the only place where land is cheap enough to afford putting up these units. The Green Belt is also threatened by new Government and District Council proposals for all villages to be forced to provide land for gypsy or travellers permanent sites. Histon and Impington will potentially have to find some 30 pitches (pitch = site for two caravans plus permanent toilet and washing facilities) in possibly two locations by the autumn of 2007. I thank Councillor Rose for the extra work he has put in on some of these issues, including assisting Councillor Mason, our drainage expert.

For those of our residents who prefer to live in our village community there is further bad news in that the Inspectors overseeing the approval of the South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework, that replaces the Local Plan in the planning process, have upped the number of dwellings that will be built in Northstowe by 2,000 to 10,000. The University and the National Institute of Agricultural Botany are seeking to build over the whole of the Green Belt between the Huntingdon Road and the A14/M11 affecting our village through increased traffic at King Hedges Road and drainage issues affecting our side of the A14. Thirdly, the building programme at Arbury continues apace and there are now plans to convert some of the current industrial building permissions to housing. This means potentially upwards of 1300 houses on this small site delivering traffic etc. onto the Histon road. There is also a challenge to the LDF, which, if successful would take land between Impington and Milton out of the Green Belt for development.

This brings me to the activities of our Highways and Transport Sub-Committee, which meets every other month on the Thursday before our full Council meeting. The Milton Park & Ride scheme and its effect on cycling between the two villages has raised concerns with all three villages and the Cambridge Cycling Campaign. On the good news front we now have an excellent new cycle way along Gatehouse (Meadow) Road and no doubt time will ease the pain of having the road closed for a good number of weeks. Our thanks go to County Councillor David Jenkins for at least getting the road open at weekends during this period. We have also, with Impington, committed to getting a traffic survey done of our villages. This will be an invaluable tool to use when discussing traffic impact on future developments with the County Council.

We have been very disappointed at the slow progress in addressing a number of traffic issues within the village, notably, parking in New School Road, the effect of

buses on thatched roofs in Church Street and the "Safer Routes to School" initiative at the crossing by the Co-op stores. We have also been promised additional yellow lines in Station Road and some action on the posts that are getting knocked over with alarming regularity alongside the Kay Hitch Way junction with Station Road. The consistent theme we here from officials is that there is an alarming lack of funds at the County Council to get any of this work done. We will continue to badger to get these promised works completed.

The Finance sub-committee has taken over the work of putting together our annual precept and it is worthy of note, for all the wrong reasons, that we now find ourselves requesting more than £100,000 from residents in 2007-08 for the first time, to keep our activities and duties ticking over. Councillor John Emmines has taken responsibility for Health & Safety and reviewed our now mandatory risk analysis procedures. The work is however ongoing.

The work of the Employment sub-committee has continued although progress in bringing our contracts in line has proved slow at times. For keeping going on this project I must thank Councillors Chris Jones and Marion Cleaver, especially the latter, for her grit and determination to see results accrue.

Angela Young and Lynda Marsh continue to provide an excellent service as Clerks to Councillors and the community. I have major concerns, which I know a lot of you share, about our continuing ability to provide a first class service with limited resources and a plethora of reports, new bodies and communications from a multitude of statutory bodies that have to be read and responded to.

I have to single out the efforts of Councillor Neil Davies together with Councillors Fuff Munnelly, Marion Cleaver and our chairman Ray Wynn on the Recreation Ground Committee. As well as absorbing the majority of our annual funding this committee has to work tirelessly to ensure that our major asset is utilised and kept in good repair and maintenance. As activities have increased so has the administrative burden and I must once again congratulate the groundsman, Steve Campian and his staff for the excellent facilities.

The Environment sub-committee meets alternate months on a Tuesday under the chairmanship of Councillor Mike Mason, who tireless work on so many aspects of village life on our behalf cannot be highly praised enough. It brings together footpaths, to which we are indebted to Val Taylor, allotments, thanks to Malcolm Ruel and Allan Eade and Allan again for keeping a watchful eye on all the planning applications that require work done to our trees. Our wishes go out to Allan for a speedy recovery from his recent operation. As a result Councillor Ian Levitt has kindly assumed this role on a temporary basis alongside his sterling work on the planning sub-committee. Hurry back Alan, from both of us!

The Brook scheme at the Village Green awaits stage two to be implemented and after the stunning success of stage one, funds have been now been allocated for the completion of this work this year. Impetus is also being put on completing stage two of the installation of the Christmas Lights on the Green. It would be good to get these two projects completed before the end of our tenure as councillors next year. The children's playground in the centre of the village continues to be popular and our thanks to Councillors Munnelly and Barrett for keeping it well maintained and free from detritus.

Our Legal and Property sub-committee continues to sweep up on work such as changes to Standards Board regulations, updating the bye-laws and challenges to bring the War Memorial project a stage closer. We are looking both to do some restoration work on it as well as take title and responsibility for the land in Water Lane.

The Youth Committee, whilst not a body attached to the Parish Councils, is funded by both and thanks are due to them and in particular Councillors Abdullah and Davies for the work they do with young people in our villages. Our thanks also, to those who represent us with our local schools and to Councillor Ruel for his work in updating the remit, working with the Charity Commission, of the Histon Porsland Charity. As a result we have invited Impington to provide a trustee for this body, further strengthening the ties between the two villages.

We are again grateful to Councillor Payne of Impington for keeping an excellent joint web site focussed and up to-date, although the volume of work required to keep it this way has necessitated some major cajoling recently of our Councillors to pitch in and help. Lastly, I would like to thank our District Councillors; Chatfield, Davies and Mason for keeping our interests in front of South Cambridgeshire Council and fighting our corner when required to.

Finally, I would like to spur councillors on to see whether we can finish most of the projects that we have initiated, before next May and also help to keep reminding both District and County Councils that they have to deliver as well. A Parish Councillor's life seems to get tougher each year but, as we all signed on for the duration, now is perhaps the time to redouble our efforts to deliver what we know we as a team are capable of.

Max Parish
Chairman
May 2007