

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



Annual Report

Welcome to the 114th Annual Parish Meeting reporting on the final year of the last five year term of office and forward to the start of this new four year one - 2008 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.

By mentioning how many Annual Parish Meetings have gone before it reminds us that we are part of a tradition of service and although, maybe, our achievements could be seen as just a small sentence in the book that is the history of our village, we still have an obligation to try to steer a course between preserving what is best and the acceptance of inevitable change. The future of our community is shaped partly from the way that Government imposes its will on the landscape, through for instance housing and parking provision densities and removal of our Green Belt and the need we have to provide housing and facilities for all age groups to keep a live and thriving village, where people wish to put down roots. As part of this history, I had the honour of saying "Thank You" to six of our Parish Councillors recently, who are standing down and who between them have clocked up an impressive 102 years of service to our community. In order of length of service they are: Mike Mason (32years), Ray Wynn (29), Malcolm Ruel (21), Fuff Munnely (9), Mike Barrett (6) and Val Taylor (5). The amount of knowledge and expertise they have accumulated will be sadly missed, though we are looking forward to perhaps new ideas and impetus from our new councillors.

I would like to dwell briefly at this time, on the disappointment at not being able to hold a contested Parish Council election this year and we are looking to co-opt a further two councillors as a result over the next few weeks. It will also do no harm to repeat my mantra that individuals can be persuaded to stand for election as District and County Councillors with no previous knowledge of how the local government system works and, if elected, face a learning curve so steep as to make them ineffective for a considerable period of time, to the detriment of the people they are there to represent. We believe, and experience shows, that becoming a Parish Councillor first gives you a head start.

Looking back at my report for last year, in the continuing grind of local government, I see the same themes re-occurring. In conjunction with Impington Parish Council we have recently responded to the third Northstowe outline planning application, which will take up considerable amounts of our time this year as it wends its way through the planning process. Governments and Developers like to blame local planning authorities for delays to the processing of applications, but in this case it is the Government's agent (English Partnership) stepping in as co-developer that has created the necessity for all of us to go over it all again.

We are also still in the planning stages, a year later, on the University and the National Institute of Agricultural Botany's plans to build over the whole of the Green Belt between the Huntingdon Road and the A14. This affects our village through increased traffic at King Hedges Road and drainage issues on our side of the A14.

The project to widen the A14 to four lanes both ways between us and the City stumbles on although we now have joint contractors recently appointed.

On a positive front our colleagues at Impington have seen progress at Arbury Park on the new housing development with nearly half the original housing allocation built and it looks likely that the District Council will grant the resident's request to form a separate Parish Council later this year.

On our planning front the Clay Street Exelcare, Kay Hitch Way Brackenbury Manor and Chivers Way Bramley Court retirement and care schemes are all now completed and Anglian Water has agreed to review the problems with the sewerage system in our villages by the autumn. The "Save our Station" campaign attracted some interest and a lot of negativity from the Guided Bus team, no change there, but the decision on what is going to happen to this key village site is still to be resolved. The District Council advised us to develop a site specific plan for the station site that could be adopted as supplementary planning guidance, but unfortunately the resource and leadership to make this happen have yet to appear.

The Local Development Framework (LDF) that will guide planning policies over the next decade is still evolving, and we contributed comments, through Cllrs. Mason and Payne, on the proposed site specific policies section in the autumn, particularly in connection with traffic and drainage. The District Council was also due in the autumn to propose locations for new gypsy and travellers sites. This has been delayed, possibly because the East of England Regional Body was still evolving regional planning guidance for most of the year. We await the proposals for Histon & Impington with interest. We have also commented on the North West Cambridge Area Action Plan and the proposals for housing on the "Unwin" site during the past year. I would like to thank Mike Barrett for chairing the Planning Committee so professionally again during the year and to Cllrs Foster and Levitt especially for their contribution in this area.

The Highways and Transport committee has had discussions with groups in the villages that want the lowering of speed limits from 40 to 30 and 30 to 20. The progress of the Guided Bus through our villages continues to bring headaches, not least the effect of road closures on traffic and commerce in the village. It has also affected our own proposed traffic survey. This has now been postponed yet again until the autumn because of the road closures and work being carried out in adjacent villages. Having been pleased by the completion of the cycleway between us and Girton/Oakington, we were extremely unhappy to see this used as an excuse to withdraw the school bus service. The argument that the County

Council is just following Government Policies unacceptable to us, the parents and children who it will affect.

Our Environment committee under its new chairman, John Emmines, has a lot of ongoing projects that we would all like to see finished. They include the challenge of getting the second stage of the Christmas Lights installed this year, persuading County Highways that the bollards we want to install on our Green, can be and making the next stage of the Brook Enhancement scheme happen, whilst ensuring that the vegetation from the first stage is kept in trim. In addition we are committed to updating the under five play equipment on the Green. We are also resisting the call to replace our roundabout and slide with more modern plastic alternatives, despite the cost and efforts to find replacement parts that are usually more often than not the result of mindless vandalism.

This year we agreed to merge the Finance Committee with Legal & Property and I would like to thank John Emmines again for his work on Health & Safety and Risk analysis. The War Memorial facelift and replacement lettering were completed at considerable cost in time for the Remembrance Day service, thanks to herculean efforts by the Clerk and Cllr Mason. We have now agreed to set up a maintenance fund to spread the cost of carrying out its five yearly renovations. My own target is now to complete the work on securing the War Memorial site for future generations, for which we have been battling the County Council for, what appears to be, the last ten years. Other issues dealt with apart from the annual budgeting exercise have been the adoption of the model code of conduct, reviewing and commenting on the new National Statutory Planning form being introduced, producing a low cost housing policy for the village and almost joining the Parish Path Partnership, which has provided a new path to Girton under the Northstowe initiative. 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.

There has been much discussion this last year about the rising level of Anti-Social Behaviour in certain areas of the two villages, leading to an angry confrontation with the Police at the January Police panel meeting. As a result substantial resources were committed for a three month period, which considerably reduced the number of incidents. It appears to have flared up again recently, as daylight hours get longer. We have asked that, as part of an attempt to improve communications between the Police and the Community, they considering re-committing to attend Parish Council meetings on a quarterly basis. This was dropped about two years ago because of staffing problems. I note that in the last few months virtually all the local police presence from Inspector down to Community Support Officers has been replaced. No business looking for continuity with its customers would consider doing this. I wish to place on record the work of Cllrs. Emmines and Foster for their contribution to the Police Neighbourhood Panel meetings.

Continuing on a theme connected mainly with young people, the Youth Group have found it difficult to find an appropriate place in the villages to put a Skate Park. This is particularly disappointing having raised most of the finance required. Providing suitable facilities is one way of reducing the amount of Anti-Social Behaviour. On the upside, the Recreation Ground goes from strength to strength, thanks to the Management Committee's hard work. We are indebted to Marian Cleaver, Fuff Munnelly, Ray Wynn and especially Neil Davies for the sheer range of activities and events now offered. None of which, of course could happen without the efforts of our Recreation Clerk Lynda Marsh and her backroom team including Steve Campion, our Groundsman.

Our joint working group on employment matters with Impington Parish Council no longer meets, having achieved its initial objectives, although Councillors Cleaver and Jones have continued to perform the role for our own Parish, for which we thank them. We have decided to continue this as an ad hoc committee, meeting as and when required to deal with policy issues arising from employment. During the year also, our councillors met twice, informally, to air their thoughts on the future direction of the Parish Council.

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. Apart from our recently re-affirmed decision not to join Impington in the Quality Council scheme, the main areas of concern appear to be the reduction of Parish Councillors from twenty six to nineteen and the potential loss of independence of Impington Village. On the latter argument, Oakington and Westwick villages do not seem to have suffered from having a single Parish Council and there are other examples within the District we could learn from. It is always difficult, with the amount of work Parish Councils now have to address, to look favourably on a reduction in Councillors, but Impington will lose three when Arbury Park separates and we currently have two vacancies. Our mission this year is to take our case out to the two villages to gauge the level of support from residents. I know our shared secretariat would welcome the reduction in workload from doing things once not twice, as well as to cut down on the number of evening meetings and the opportunities to regularise our joint meetings on planning issues, employment and highways as well as the Recreation Ground would seem sensible.

Also looking forward, we have been very disappointed at the slow progress in addressing a number of traffic issues within the village, promises of yellow lines in Station Road have not been delivered, our replacement car park direction sign seems as far off as ever, even though we have agreed to pay for it, and our request for details of the safety audit carried out that meant the County Council would not support the safer routes to school initiative at the crossing by the Co-op stores, have yet to materialise. We need to ensure that we are not conveniently sidelined by a department under pressure.

Angela Young and Lynda Marsh continue to providing a first class service to Councillors and the community for which we thank them. We will however be looking this year at how we may continue to improve the effectiveness of the administration function.

I would like to thank Alan Eade for his work as both Tree Officer and looking after our allotments with the Clerk. 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 to those who represent us with our local schools and to Councillor Ruel in particular with the Histon Poolsland Charity. Finally, our thanks go to Denis Payne for keeping an excellent joint parishes website going through thick and thin and to our District Councillors; Chatfield, Davies and Mason for keeping our interests in front of South Cambridgeshire Council and fighting our corner when required to.

Max Parish
May 2008