

Chairman's report - 18 May 2007 - 19 May 2008

I'd like to welcome everyone to this 114th Annual Parish Meeting.

The year in more detail is covered in our annual report, it's on our website and available from the Clerk, its 3000 words and 6 pages - and still isn't as detailed as it might be - but please do read it, it will give you a good flavour of the work that we do.

At a time when local government is seemingly in a continual state of flux, unitary councils, boundary changes, the changing balance of political power I believe that the parish council sector, and our Parish Council in particular, is a point of stability for residents, and continues to provide a valuable service.

However, some of those changes affect even us, and the work to give birth to the new community at Arbury Park is moving forward towards the creation of a new Parish, and new Parish Council. The remaining parish will be smaller, but more focussed north of the A14.

In addition, the District and City Councils are planning a review of their boundary. This will take some time - the relevant body is busy looking at all of the unitary bids. The current proposals will take Kings Meadows into the City, a move Council recommended last year.

This nibbling away at Impington's boundary by Cambridge City has been going on since the 1930's - but the A14 will eventually form an effective barrier for further City expansion plans!

The Council has many component parts - and I'd like to comment on the contribution from our Councillors. Councillors are volunteers - they do not get any allowance, unlike District & County Councillors. They're here because they want to make a difference in our community.

I am constantly amazed by the rich variety of skills, knowledge and background experience that our Councillors bring to Council. On top of that is the commitment to the role and the considerable number of hours put in, going to meetings, working in the community, preparing papers. I haven't totalled that - and I don't intend to try. I will say just two things - firstly, whilst the figure that is often quoted is "3 hours a week" - I believe that Impington Councillors put in a great deal more than that! And secondly, it's an honour to be part of that team, and to have been the chairman - thank you for everything that you do.

It is unusual for the work of the Council to be noticed or commented upon, so I make no excuse for quoting from the Interim Report of the District Council's Scrutiny Task &

Finish Group looking at Arbury Park. The chairman of the group, Cllr Tony Orgee (and, by the way, Chairman of the County Council) said:

“Equally I need to pass on our admiration of the work of Impington Parish Council in supporting the emerging community. The workload has been far greater than they, or the District Council had envisaged and the residents of Arbury Park have much to thank them for.”

Council will certainly second the comment about workload.

Our elections have just passed - we did not have a contested election this year - to the regret of many, including myself. Some Principal Authority Councillors believe that you need that to confirm the democratic mandate that we do have from the process. We did, however, have nominations for all of our seats, and I'd like to welcome our new Councillors Chris Creasey and Jens Kirschner, both from Arbury Park, to the team.

I'd like to comment also on the District elections - part of the contest there was on experience - and it was interesting to see that work at the Parish Council level referenced. Whilst the workings of a Parish Council, unencumbered by party politics, are different to that at District or County, I cannot but endorse it as sound training for Councillors of Principal Authorities.

Of the matters that have occupied much time in the last year there are a number of common themes:

Transport is one of those. Of course, it links in with planning, as well, and I'd highlight:

- A14 - This continues to be a major issue for the whole area. Not only are many of us dependent on it to get to work and more general travel, we are also very conscious of the times when there has been an accident causing traffic levels to rise dramatically through the village and residents (myself included) have queues of vehicles outside our homes for hours. At least the design contractor has been appointed, but there are confused messages from Government and DfT as to the will to get on with this work;
- The Guided Bus continues to impact on our lives. Most of the road works are now complete, and the impact on businesses and residents alike is reducing. However, there will be short term impact on residents as the build of the guideway, and the stop itself, is completed. By the way, it took a surprising amount of effort, but it has been agreed that the stop will be named Histon & Impington.

When the service starts running, and what the impact of the buses using the guideway will be, are two of the unknowns. This scheme is unlike anything else in

the world, and we have to hope that teething problems are few, and that we will see the promised reduction in road traffic.

The efforts to Save the Station have had partial success - the building is still standing, and whilst it is obviously different without the canopy, it is still worth preserving. We continue to do what we can to ensure that that is the case, and hope for confirmation later in the year of the forward plans for the site.

Works to date have had well publicised impacts on our traders, an important part of our community, and I would like to congratulate them for a very successful event on April 12th - the village was filled with activities and people - it would certainly get my support if it turned into an annual event.

- Residents continue to be concerned about traffic speeds - the speed bumps and raised cushions having less impact than we were promised. At the same time the rising price of petrol and diesel, and the environmental impacts of car use, are making people think again. Whether we can do something to make a real difference in our community is another question - the levels of funding required now for works on our roads are phenomenal. However, we will try!

Policing - Councillors regularly attend the Neighbourhood Panel meetings - and Anti-Social Behaviour in Histon and Impington has been a hot topic at most of these. It truly became a priority earlier in the year, and after much work by Police, has been brought under some control. It's recognised that this sort of thing goes through peaks and troughs. What we need to do is to put in place the action necessary to reduce the size and number of peaks and keep the troughs lower. That's going to need input and support from County, District and Parish Councils - and is going to take real work.

Planning - as always a major topic. I'd highlight the Unwins application. Whilst everyone objected to the proposed scheme there were some positive points. Firstly, that we were able to meet the applicants beforehand - and they did listen to our points. Secondly, their willingness to organise a public exhibition of the plans for all to see. We did our best to ensure that all residents who would be immediately affected knew of that, and knew of the District Council's willingness to change the closing dates for comments. Finally, many residents commented to the District Council, and many also came to the Council's Planning Committee meeting. Based on all of that work, and taking comments from a number of expert residents into account, a full objection from the Council was submitted, and most of the points were carried forward to the District's refusal of the application.

It would be great if more applicants, particularly for major schemes, were to take such an approach to working with the community.

And so now for a look to future:

“Business as usual” - of course - it may be that we could work smarter, but the normal run of business is a significant load, and leaves little time spare to move forward. We look forward to a breathing space, perhaps when Northstowe, Arbury Park, A14 widening are “done and dusted”.

Working with Histon Parish Council - we continue to try to find ways to work more closely and effectively with Histon whilst juggling the very real workload that large scale development planning applications and creating and mentoring a new parish bring.

The work on planning will continue. There is a clear short term downturn in the housing market - and that is impacting the speculative developers, nevertheless major applications will continue - particularly Northstowe, given the massive investment that has been made in land. The application for Unwins will surely return, in a revised form - the land cost Luminus almost £4M.

Of course, we hope that residents of Arbury Park will take on the work in their community through their new Parish Council.

Planning comes in another guise as it is our intent to conduct a “Parish Plan”. This will look at a wide range of issues across Impington (& Histon) to help us (and District and County Councils) better meet the community’s needs and shape how and where the village changes.

Whilst this is being led by Parish Councillors now, it must have community input/leadership - and it needs a team to make it happen. Anyone (and everyone) can contribute to that, all sorts of jobs will need to be done - and knowledge of, and caring for the future of, our community is the only qualification needed.

I’d like to thank Councillors who have left us this year - Steve Unwin, Jo Teague. I’d also like to thank the Councillors from the rest of the local government family that work for our residents along side us - Cllrs Chatfield, Davies and Mason at District and Bradney and Jenkins at County

Last but not least I’d like to thank our staff Angela, Lynda, Sarah, Steve, Terry and Trevor - without whom we’d not be able to do anything.

*Denis W Payne
19th May 2008*