

Chairman's Statement. Hanslope Parish Council March 2023

In the three terms that I have served on the Parish Council over the past twelve years, I think that the most recent four-year term has been the least normal - whatever normal is.

This has been due, in the main, to the Parish Council having to help the village cope with the three major housing developments that have/are still taking place.

In the first instance there has been a great deal of disruption, over which we have not had a great deal of control. In the main, we can only liaise and advise with the developers and the departments of MK Council and other agencies that, in theory, monitor and control their activities. Sometimes they listen to us and at other times they do not- it can be very frustrating.

Many of the issues arising from such, involve matters concerning the roads and pavements in the village; ranging from traffic calming to potholes, to damaged pavements and street lighting; or environmental issues such as damage to verges, flooding from bad drains and issues involving grass cutting/hedge trimming/trees on land controlled by MK Council. The Parish Council has very little power or responsibility to resolve matters arising from many of these issues, other than to just act as a signposting body to the relevant departments of MK Council, such as Environment and Highways, or to the relevant agencies regarding sewage and water provision issues, electricity, gas and telecommunications.

Such agencies in many instances do not even bother to really consult the Parish Council about planned future activity or at very short notice announce work in the village that involves, for example, road closures; the recent activities of Gigaclear in the village being one such example. As regards Planning, the Parish Council can only give its opinion on submitted proposals to the MK Council Planning dept.

Some things are beginning to change. In the last four years we have gradually taken over from MK Council the responsibility for the maintenance of various verges and hedges in the village. If MK Council seeks to further devolve its powers this will, no doubt, continue.

Despite in many instances having very little power, the Parish Council does now have in place a legally binding document that sets out Policies that have to be considered when we are consulted on concerns such as Planning and Environmental matters that affect the village and the parish. This is our Neighbourhood Plan, that was finally approved soon after the start of our recent four-year term in 2019. To date, the existence of this plan has been of great help in supporting comments we have made on a number of larger scale planning applications and is currently being updated in order to keep it legally current. The recent village survey was part of this process.

The secondary effect of these developments has, in the past four years, given the Parish Council the opportunity to develop the wider assets and social infrastructure of the village. This has been because of the availability of larger funds than were available to previous Parish Councils. These have been from three main sources. The first from so called S106 funds from the developments, the second new grants available from various bodies for such as to improve energy sustainability, the third from the Parish Council having to use, on our auditors advice, reserves from our own funds that we had steadily built up in previous council terms as a safeguard against potential legal fee's from the planning discussions we were involved with from 2015 to 2019.

These more positive developments, plus the regular services that we are involved in providing, are what I would like to spend the rest of this statement briefly addressing with the help of those Councillors that were more intimately involved with them.

First I will ask **Councillor and our Vice Chair Dorothy Courtman** to talk about the various environmental and highway matters we have been involved with, from such as traffic monitoring and calming in the village, SID's, including the White Gates – issues involving Rights of Way, Police liaison, to the installation of new and replacement benches at various locations. ..

Councillor **Roland Simpkins** will then outline the developments to the allotments, the work done on the village ponds – The Horse Ponds and Harkness Court – and the regular grass and hedging cutting activity and dog waste bins.

Councillor **James Gregory** will outline the developments to the recreation ground, including the new MUGA, drainage works on the football pitch,

improvement to the cricket artificial wicket and issues involving the usage of the Pavilion and Changing rooms, installation of boot scraper.

Councillor **Alison Andrew** will outline the support we have /are giving to the community, including support for the Platinum Jubilee celebration and the forthcoming Coronation, summer childrens play sessions from the Play Association, seasonal craft boxes, support for the village Santa run and the warm space sessions in the Community hall, installation of defibrillators on the Recreation ground and in Long Street and the outdoor gym.

The past few years have also seen the Parish Council acquire on behalf of the parish substantial assets. As well as the Pavilion and Changing rooms on the recreation ground, which were refurbished using S 106 funds, we now have legal titles to both the Recreation Ground itself and the Allotments and have also taken over the former Baden Lodge from the Scout and Guide Association, which we have been/are gradually refurbishing to be a Community facility This has included sorting out the drains that serve all the Rec buildings which we found when we took over responsibility for all were in a bad way.

Councillor Simon Proctor will then outline how/why the number of such assets will increase in the near future.

Councillor **Eileen Price** will then briefly outline the administrative and audit burden, including Planning responses, that are a vital part in running the Parish Council, maintaining our finances, helping us to budget and keeping the parish precept at reasonable rates. Much of this of course is carried out on a day to day basis by our Clerk – Gill Merry – who does an excellent job and also keeps us on the ‘legal straight and narrow’

Over to you **Dorothy**.....

Thank you **Eileen** and all.

The clerk keeping us on the ‘legal straight and narrow’ is very important at a times when the rules which we have to abide by seem to change on almost a monthly basis, as a result of changes to both local and national government policy and legislation. For example, while we can and do give an annual large grant to help the Village Hall keep running as a community asset, we cannot give any funding to religious establishments, even funds to help maintain the church graveyard.

There are however some loopholes. We discovered that, in I think it was the 1957 Local Government Act, we could support the repair /refurbishment of a 'parish clock' even if it was situated on a church tower, and this we have done.

It is pleasing to report that as a result of the development activity more tree's have been planted in the village over the past four years than in my knowledge in the past 40. We also have a 'policy; to maintain and protect as many of the existing the mature trees that is possible.

The S 106 funds are not the sole right of the Parish Council to use and where we have thought it appropriate we have encouraged others to take advantage of this opportunity. This includes the building of a new store room for the Village Hall, the resurfacing of the car park at the Surgery and the allocation of funds to FEOFEE. Currently we are working closely with the Surgery on a major proposal to use S106 funds to build a new dispensary and refurbish other parts of the existing building.

To conclude many aspects of the work of the Parish Council can be frustrating – for example we warned that the plan for replacement of the T junction near the Watts Arms by a Roundabout would also put the historic finger signpost in danger of being damaged – no one listened to use. Sure enough within a short period of time a lorry smashed part of it.

However, it is a good feeling when we can organise to put things right and the historic finger post has been repaired and relocated to a safer position – although it sometimes takes more time than anticipated to get things done – in this case almost two years.

Dr Clephan Martin Palmer

Chair Hanslope Parish Council