

# Kent's Hill & Monkston Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting May 10th 2010

## Parish Council Chairman's Report

### Personnel

The Parish Council this year has continued to be served by eleven Councillors. In May 2009 Clr. Peter Laws was elected as Chair and Clr. Ken Maudsley as Vice-Chair. Our Parish Councillors have worked tirelessly on behalf of the residents in our Parish on a number of issues and projects and I extend my thanks to them all on behalf of the population for their attention to detail and their striving for a better environment. Our household count is now at 3102 dwellings with approximately 12,000 people living within our boundary, roughly the size of a small town.

Amanda Wilmot continued her tenure as Parish Clerk, with her workload set at 60 hours or less per month so that she may undertake work at her local school. Amanda's role and performance have been reviewed and once again she has excelled. Her salary, terms and conditions have been reviewed, agreed and re-signed for another year, and will be reviewed again next year in January. My thanks again go to Amanda for her diligence and help to me as chair.

### Communication

**Newsletter:** We have published our news sheet 'INFACT' in full colour on four occasions, David King our delivery person has proved to be a very reliable local resource, coping with extra flyers and enclosures from time to time. The newsletter seems to have a wider reputation and readership than just our Parish, and we should perhaps think about direct distribution to a number of people/organisations outside the Parish for effective communication. For example these could go into libraries, doctors waiting rooms, cafes, churches etc.

**Web site:** We continue to give people the opportunity to read about all our activities on-line through our web site where downloads are available for key documents. All our meeting minutes, policy documents, reports and the like can be found there. People can find lots of diverse information about most happenings and facilities in the Parish and seek further information through internet links. Web site hits continue at about the same level as last year with a good number of enquiries coming from the 'contact us' facility.

**Meetings:** We have continued to use two meeting places for meetings. These are at Kents Hill Church and Monkston Community Centre. I expect that we will find a variety of new venues with sufficient space for visitors and the public who are always welcome to our meetings. The new Monkston Park community centre will be available late in 2010 and we are exploring using meeting facilities at Kents Hill Park Conference Centre. We welcome our ward councillors to meetings and applaud their input on a number of agenda items and for keeping us abreast with news from the corridors of power at MKC.

**Neighbourhood action group (NAG):** The Parish Council continue to drive forward the work of the NAG. Cllr. Robert Barnes now takes on the role of Chair taking over from Cllr. Graham Clark. The NAG has a full agenda of difficult issues identified by the public through consultation questionnaires and combines the strengths and facilities of Thames Valley Police Neighbourhood Policing Unit and Milton Keynes Council. We also rely on a number of local residents who volunteer to get involved in this valuable aspect of our local activities. Our Parish Clerk also clerks the NAG, bringing her own expertise to the work.

### Funding and Precept

Our precept decisions are made in January each year as we forecast the depth our spending needs. As the country faces continued recession with many families facing real financial difficulties we made the decision this year to continue with a standstill budget, maintaining the cost per household at £20. That is a standstill for three successive years. We think this is great value for money and reflects our prudent vigilance of our financial affairs. A small amount of our reserves was used to make this possible and we continue to keep enough savings in place to cover any unexpected eventualities which may arise during the year.

Our Clerk's due diligence has again given us a clean bill of financial health from both our local and external auditors. We were singled out for special checks by our external auditors as part of their 5% spot check system. You will be gratified to know that no discrepancies were found.

We continue with risk analysis of our work and this year we have been looking at the condition and safe location and installation of our assets.

The Parish Council have continued with their grant funding scheme, designed to help with the cost of projects for local organisations. We are always open to requests for grants and we have in place a budget to cover several projects.

## Projects

**Allotments:** Our allotments continue to give our Clerk considerable workload, not because of tenancies but because of continued efforts to energise MKC into drainage work at Kents Hill and HCA/MKC to bring the new allotment at Monkston Park on line. There is a massive demand for allotments and we need the new site at Monkston as soon as possible. All this is troublesome and difficult.

As I write this, we do now seem to be getting something moving at Kents Hill, as MKC plan to improve the drainage to prevent further flooding across the allotment and into neighbour's gardens.

The process to take on the new allotment at Monkston Park has been thoroughly frustrating for all concerned, including our new prospective tenants. The work of HCA (Homes and Community Agency) has now reached a point where a formal complaint is needed to the chief executive. The process has left the parish out of pocket and our requirements for a 'proper job' unfinished. Having said that, I hope that we will have formal title to the allotments at the end of April.

Monkston allotments are a completely different matter. In this case we have to motivate a development contractor who is somewhat reluctant to do anything, but still has a legal responsibility. We have sought the help of HCA, but we shouldn't hold our breath! However we may get a surprise one day.

**Youth and Play for the Young:** The Parish Council have withdrawn for the time being from its efforts to reconstruct the youth club at Monkston. The management of the club and its facilities provided by MKC Youth Services were not what we have been looking for. In addition a suitable and useable venue could not be found. Our neighbouring Councils at Walton and MK Village were willing to contribute funds in a sharing opportunity, but we need some real 'blue sky' thinking from MK Council to set this project alight.

We have been working with MKC to improve a number of our play areas, especially the older ones. The play area in Lanercost Crescent in Monkston is to be updated with new facilities for the under 5's. Wilsley Pound play area in Kents Hill is to be re-developed with new and exciting equipment with the Parish contributing 50% of the project costs.

Kents Hill Park has been put on the second list of play upgrades using lottery funding to be considered this year. We are hoping that local people will get involved and have their say in what type of equipment will be used. The Parish Council have the opportunity to raise extra funds for this project from the 'Wren' scheme and we have set aside our own contribution to the project.

HCA have plans for new play and leisure facilities in the linear park managed by the Parks Trust in Monkston Park. Consultations have taken place and designs verified. New natural elements are to be employed to blend in with the local environment. These facilities will enhance the usefulness and environment of the river corridor area.

The Parish Council have plans to work with our local schools at both primary and secondary level to reinforce the youngster's care of the environment in which they live. A junior citizenship idea is to be developed with links into school curriculum subjects. We are hoping for profound long term effects on litter and anti social behaviour.

During our school holidays, the Parish Council will again sponsor the popular play days provided by the Play Association. Various venues across the whole Parish will host these morning or afternoon sessions. We are hoping that families and children will make full use of these valuable facilities.

**Environment:** Parking in the narrow streets, on verges and pavements, big buses in our estates, and big delivery trucks at the estate shops have taken our attention throughout this year. In many cases some of these problems are very difficult to solve. We will, however, continue to spend considerable effort trying to put in place viable working solutions. Of course many issues are well outside our remit and we can only badger and embarrass those who have made a less than perfect job of designing, building and approving plans for our estate streets. Generally though, we have what we have, and have to make the best of it.

Litter is always a mess somewhere. It's caused by unthinking, 'can't be bothered' people. It blights our environment, and really is a social disease. At Parish level we can only provide litter bins in the worst areas and organise litter picking and clean ups where we can. But when we get down to the cause and not the symptom, it is uncaring folk throwing their stuff away for someone else to deal with.

Two sessions of boundary review have taken place this year. The first one confirmed our current boundary and warding structure of the Parish into three distinct areas. And the second one looked at expansion of the Parish to the west and to include Woughton on the Green, Woughton Park and Passmore. Although at present we have no plans to extend the Parish we have left the door open should there be a need later on.

***Flowers in the environment:*** Having planted a number of broadleaf tree saplings this year, the Parish Council have plans to make big plantings of spring bulbs during the autumn this year. Donations of money from our ward councillors and some of our own funds will be used and MKC landscaping will provide the machinery. Natural areas have been selected, so look out for the planters at work in September. It's just another example of local councils working in partnership for a common cause.

***Kingston development:*** New plans have been issued for five further shops in the Kingston District Centre with a planning gain of a new library and adult education centre. The Parish have been consulted and the plans and our comments are now with the planners at MKC. This is an exciting development but there are things to watch out for. We have expressed our concerns.

***Bedgebury Place:*** The ex-De Montefort University accommodation flats are now no more. The site is due for future development at some time in the future by HCA. The Parish Council have seen the first attempt at a mixed type housing design, but this had a number of difficult issues which could not be resolved. No further plans have been issued at this stage, and we are awaiting an improved design and needy market.

### **Community**

***Summer Fete:*** This year the Parish Council are seeking space to bring our communities together, helping to build friendships. To aid this we are embarking on a number of annual fetes, in turn, in each of our three residential estates. We are starting this year in Monkston on July 10th and we have a small steering group working on the arrangements. The plan is to start small and build up over time as popularity grows. We are encouraging anyone and everyone to take part.

***New Community Centre:*** Work on the new Monkston Park Community centre is underway with a reported completion in the late autumn. We have told MKC that we wish it to be managed by Hertsmere but that we will recruit a steering group from local users and potential hirers. This group will work with the developers up to the kitting out and opening phase and then move on to be an advisory panel working with the management group to ensure that community interests are fulfilled.

The Parish Council continues with the work of the second tier of local government in all its aspects. Despite our best laid plans some of our ideas never come to fruition. We do rely on other organisations to play their part, and sometimes their priorities are different to ours. Despite this, we will try to do our best for the residents who live and work here. We practice open and honest and non political strategies and we will continue to encourage our residents to get involved in whatever way is needed to make this a better place to live.

I commend this annual report to the Parish Council for their acceptance.

*Peter Laws*

Chair, Kents Hill & Monkston Parish Council

May 10th 2010