

The Chairman of the Parish Council's Annual Report for the year 2007/8

It is my duty and honour to present to you my annual report on the activities and achievements of your Parish Council. These are not my activities and achievements – they are the joint efforts of your councillors and of our many partners and helpmates who do specific things for and with us. I must start by thanking my colleagues, your councillors: Ron Slough, Dennis Smith, Mike Stacey, and Joan Woollard, re-elected at the beginning of the year, and Glenn Drew and Mark Newstead, elected soon after. Special thanks go to Joan, who has served on the Council since 2003, and has now, after doing you and us so much service, decided to go on to other things. We look forward therefore to co-opting another Councillor, and I hope that each of you will consider who might represent you, and suggest it to them – and also consider whether you might put yourself forward.

There is one other thank you which I need to make at the outset. Your council would not function perhaps at all, and certainly not with the efficacy it achieves, were it not for the sterling service of our Clerk and Financial Officer, Sally Shipley, who combines efficiency with care and concern for the village and its people - as the many who have contact with her I believe all appreciate. The respect in which she is held by county, district and other parish colleagues is a significant factor in the Council's success in working in the wider world. You will be pleased I am sure to join with me in congratulating her on success in her professional examinations – not just a most effective clerk but now a qualified one too. I would also report that all of your councillors have now undertaken the full professional development course provided by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils.

This has been a year of achievement and also of beginnings – which is very much as it should be. In a fast-changing world, the Parish Council's role is to work to make and keep Mepal the place you want it to be. We can only possibly do this if we know what you want, and if we keep abreast of changes at national, regional and local level, and work with others to take benefit for you where we can, and to defend your interests where they are jeopardised.

The major achievement of this year has been the completion and opening, at the end of July last, of the Pavilion – a project undertaken at the instigation and with the continuous support of MESSAGE, who now run the facility for the village. It is a tribute to the extent to which the Pavilion was needed and to the way in which it is run, that it is difficult to remember now that it was still unfinished during the early part of 2007. Its completion, and the very successful opening celebration, was not only due to the hard work of MESSAGE members, but also to all those other people who pulled together to acquire and plant bedding plants, and to lay grass. Special thanks go to Georgina King and Cranbrook Plants for the plants, to the Gardening Club under the command of Allan Sallis, who literally put their backs into planting them out, and especially to Malcolm Peacock, who saw the bare earth and our need, and quietly and apparently calmly pulled in favours due to him and spent valuable hours procuring and laying the turf around the building, which changed the area from building site to village facility. Thank you all – and especially thank you Malcolm.

There were two further outstanding matters after the opening – the landscaping, and the small matter of closing the account. On a rather wet and blustery day a group of people who knew enough about trees prepared the ground, and children from our school's Robin class came to plant for us an oak, three silver birches and two field maples. It was a most enjoyable morning, and the trees are growing well. Many thanks to our head teacher, Miss Green, for letting the school take part, to Mrs Walker and her helpers, who brought the children over, to the adult helpers, to Sally Shipley who arranged it, and especially to the children, who will we hope enjoy the trees for many, many years to come.

The £275,000 needed to drain the field and build the pavilion was financed mainly by external grants, secured in previous years. But MESSAGE had to raise significant amounts locally, and I would congratulate them wholeheartedly on raising the full amount needed for us to close the account this year. Their job was facilitated by three people: our architect Julie Barnes, who kept a close hand on the project and charged us very little, Amanda Hall who kept MESSAGE's and our eyes firmly on the target and shaved needs and costs to the minimum, and to Sally Shipley who as the Parish Council's financial officer managed the money, juggling cash-flow and grant-provider demands, and bringing us out very close

indeed to estimate. It was a lot to ask of her, managing over two years sums equating to roughly 10 times our usual revenue budget, and a variety of complex personalities as well. We are very grateful indeed.

We are aware there are other needs, beyond the Pavilion, and the other major piece of work this year has been the promotion of the Parish Plan project, to discover what these are – hard work for some of your councillors, and for other volunteers from the parish. Copies of the Parish Plan are being delivered to every household over the coming weeks. I look forward very much to help from all quarters to achieve the actions the village want.

Working together is a major theme of the plan – and of all successful work for the village, as I hope the Pavilion project has shown. We are very pleased therefore this year to have started to form closer links with the school (Mark Newstead, as many of you know, is chair of governors, and I am now a foundation governor) and with the New Zealand 75 Squadron Trust, who maintain the memorial on the Laurel Close Green, and arrange the dignified ceremony which takes place each Remembrance Sunday. Last November we had the pleasure of an additional ceremony, when the Squadron plaque was affixed to the village sign.

We continue to support the Village Hall Management Committee, who are now moving into the exciting first real rebuilding phase of their extended plan to improve this central village facility. We have worked with the County Council's highways department in two main areas, first to achieve completion of the A142 junction project (for which you will remember we won funding and which was mainly undertaken last year – except for the warning signs, which do at last now work) and second in considering the dangers of Bridge Road, particularly at its far end. We have also worked with the District Council's waste team who provided our local recycling point. This has been successful beyond expectation. It has brought us a very useful income of £1036, but more important, it has saved for re-use a very large amount of paper, glass, metal and plastic, which would otherwise have filled more and more of the countryside. We are delighted that so many of you use it. One plea, however. It is not an easy site to keep tidy. Please don't leave there general rubbish - things for which there are no bins; please do what you can to crush cans and especially plastic (the less frequently the bin is emptied, the greater our contribution to carbon efficiency); and please don't leave your bag of recyclables for us to post into the bins.

Thanks also to the District Council, who moved very fast to achieve nationally-advertised funding to develop play, and to the district Play Partnership which they set up. Through them we have assistance lined up next year (2009/10) to improve our play equipment and it's siting on the Recreation Field. We continue to work with the County Council's Youth service, and especially their Sutton-based team, who provide our Youth Club, and who, through hard work and imagination, raise grant funding for much more, including last summer the very successful summer club days run in Sutton but with transport from Mepal for those who needed it. We are lucky to find ourselves in the catchment of the prime youth team in Cambridgeshire, and are looking this year to work more closely with them to fulfil the parish's needs. We also work with the District Council on day-to day 'development control' planning, looking on your behalf at all applications for changes within the village. Applications are advertised on our agenda – do let us know, either at the meeting or by speaking to us in the village or on the phone if you are concerned to make representation for or against any application which comes through. In other areas, joint village action is all we need. Thanks to everyone who turned out for this year's litter pick – it is a good way to meet new people as well as to tidy up.

Your councillors also continue to represent the parish's interests outside the parish, making sure that the village's voice is heard as the District, County and Region develop statutory planning frameworks, and working with other parishes and with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils to challenge applications for areas distant from the parish, but which will impact upon our lives. We were ably represented at the Mereham planning inquiry by David Stazicker, to whom we are grateful for hard work to provide a very professional representation of the parish's interests. We have also responded to South Cambridgeshire District Council about the plans for Northstowe, to ensure that additional lorry traffic does not affect us adversely, we work with the Elean Power Station to try to alleviate any local problems, and are working at present with a group of local parishes concerned at the generally increasing volume in the county of Heavy Commercial Vehicle traffic. The new system of Neighbourhood Panels, set up by the District Council with the Police and other statutory providers, is as yet in its infancy, but

provides another way to make sure our – your – voice is heard, and we are grateful to Dennis Smith for being our accredited representative at those meetings. They are public meetings, and you are very welcome to attend. Your voice will carry double the weight if you let the Parish Council know as well of any concern you intend raising there.

The local representative of the Cambridgeshire Police is our Police Support Officer. Julie Collins has worked hard in that role to get to know the village, and to make sure that local policing is more effective and responsive. She leaves us this week for a desk job in crime reduction, but as a school governor will I am pleased to say still be around in the village. Our thanks to her, and our best wishes to her successor Jonathan Hall as he begins to learn about us.

We are aware that in trying to do what the parish wants, communication is everything. In this our major weapon and support has been *Mepal People*, our local news-sheet. For some time Ann Roberts put *Mepal People* together, as part of the voluntary work she does at the computer access point here in the Village Hall, helping those who wish to become more computer literate with teething and learning problems. Ann is continuing with that aspect of her work, but earlier in the year announced her need to give up editing *Mepal People*. I would record my thanks to her for all the work she put into it. A bad few weeks followed her resignation whilst we wondered how to keep it going. Very, very many thanks to the four ladies Barbara Green, Rae Watkins, Mary Fuller and Sandy Jackson who came forward to form an editorial and production group. I am pleased to see the newsletter thriving under their control. A hard copy newsletter is an immense asset. But we are aware also of the need to communicate electronically with those of you for whom that is the preference. Work has started this year on compilation of a website not just for the Parish Council but for the village as a whole, and we look forward to launching this properly in the coming weeks. Meanwhile, if you wish to read our agenda and/or minutes without coming down to the Noticeboard in the High Street, please give Sally your e-mail address. Lastly, we also intend, for this year, to publish and distribute house-to-house an Annual Report, so that you are better informed about what we are doing and what we intend to do.

Mrs Elizabeth Stazicker
May 2008