



SIMPSON AND ASHLAND PARISH COUNCIL

Report for the Annual Parish Meeting 2018

The Annual Parish Meeting (APM), provides the opportunity to look back over the last year or so but also to look forward to what will happen with Simpson & Ashland over the coming twelve month period. It also provides the opportunity for the Parish Council to formally thank everybody who has been involved in the life of the parish, for their inputs and efforts. What residents across Simpson and Ashland do day in and day out to enhance this part of Milton Keynes is greatly appreciated and I and all Cllrs would like to thank everybody for what they do, much of which is not always visible but has a real impact on those who live, visit or work in the area. And it is worth noting that the parish itself has changed over the last twelve months and will continue to do so going forward. And this change is not only in terms of what can be seen, as in ongoing developments of the physical space, but also in the services that we as a community need both now and going forward, as well as the role that we all play in supporting our friends and neighbours and the wider community.

In terms of physical developments in the area, we are now hopefully moving to the point at which the Ashland estate will be fully complete- current estimates give an end date of the last week in July. The journey to completion has been a very long and challenging one. Simpson & Ashland Parish Council (SAPC) has continued to work with the relevant agencies such as Milton Keynes Council (MKC), the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and Paul Newman New Homes Ltd (the developer) to push for completion, and have been supported by Cllr Peter McDonald (one of our ward Cllrs). The meeting in autumn 2017, arranged and hosted by SAPC, provided the opportunity for residents to meet with the HCA and the developer and raise their concerns. SAPC is disappointed that completion has taken so long and has shared the frustrations of the residents who have had to live in what has, for much of Ashland, been a building site for over eight years. Now that many of the roads are complete and the open and green spaces are being put in, the final vision for the built environment within Ashland will be realised. We also look forward to the completion of the Blue Light Hub centre over the next year or so. As well as working to encourage the completion of the estate, SAPC has been active in responding to various planning applications, supporting these where residents and the council were in approval, but rejecting or suggesting amendments as appropriate. For example, SAPC has been very active in working with MKC to oppose the development of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and illegal development on the estate. In addition, we have directly lobbied the relevant lead members for housing at MKC to highlight to them the issues that residents within the parish are facing. Given our small size, it is encouraging to hear from MKC colleagues the impact that we are having at a MK wide level, which is way in excess of what a council this size would be expected to have.

Within Simpson, it is evident that the physical environment will change over the next twelve months as developments come on stream. Residents worked with SAPC in pulling together a robust campaign around the proposed development at 211 Simpson (the Early Intervention Centre site) that led to the rejection of the initial plans. SAPC has continued to work with MKC and its planning officers on other applications within Simpson to ensure that proposed developments are, as outlined in the SAPC Vision Document, fit for purpose and that a proportion are affordable. As I write, we are awaiting a revised planning submission but in the meeting that was held with the applicants in April 2018, it was evident that resident feedback on what would, or indeed would not be appropriate development for that site had been taken on board. And as with the first application, residents will be able to feed in their views on any resubmission both through SAPC and in their own right. Over the next year it is likely that the Walnuts Site will be converted to provide a MKC run day centre for those with severe dementia and we will update residents as specific plans become clearer. Opposite the Walnuts, and at the very centre of the village is the Five Acres Nursing Home site and we understand that the site has now been sold and that a new care home will open on the site. We look forward to welcoming staff and residents to the parish. We continue to lobby MKC to encourage the landowner of the land adjacent to Walden Croft to build houses and are disappointed that land-banking such as this is taking place when the need for local housing continues apace.

As a council, we have realised over the last twelve months that the SAPC approach to planning could be refined and so have developed a robust and transparent system that will ensure greater awareness amongst residents of local planning applications. To this end we now have a named Cllr for planning and hold a parish planning meeting that is open to all residents once every two months. With the demand on land in the parish growing, we will continue to review our approach to planning to ensure that it continues to be effective.

SAPC will also continue to develop the work that it does to support the communities within Simpson and Ashland. We receive a great deal of advice and feedback from residents, much of it suggesting what we should or indeed, should not do, or how we could do things better. We do, where possible, act on the advice we get but as the council, we sometimes have to make a judgement about what we can do and when, and how we do it. This does not always endear us to all residents but we have to see the bigger picture and work within the legal and financial parameters that we have as a publically accountable body, to address concerns. We are also aware that for many residents, SAPC is not as meaningful to them as it could be and they are not aware of the work that we do or the key role that we have. To this end, we have continued to develop our online media presence (the SAPC Facebook page now has over 230 members) as well as continuing to publish the parish newsletter four times a year. But we want to do much more than this and so, in autumn 2017, SAPC commissioned Community Action: MK to carry out a series of activities in Simpson including focus groups, individual interviews and online and paper surveys, to capture the views on:

1. What residents in Simpson connect to in Milton Keynes
2. What activities and services residents of Simpson would like to be able to access and what type of place they would like Simpson to be; and
3. What people are concerned about in their current and future life.

The outcomes of this work have been pulled together in a report that will provide SAPC with the information to ground its work in the coming twelve month period and beyond. Once the Ashland development is complete we will carry out a similar exercise to capture the views of residents in this part of the parish, to ensure that all voices from across the community are heard.

Within the context of a continued reduction of budget at MKC level and cost pressures on other local services (for example the NHS), and from the feedback we receive, SAPC knows that there are real issues and challenges that some of our residents are facing which will not go away. We are keen to continue to work with residents to put in place systems, structures and approaches that may address, or at least mitigate, some of these challenges. We don't have the capacity or indeed the financial resources to do this on our own and so much of what we do as a council is to facilitate action or activity and work alongside, rather than simply provide for, residents. This facilitative model is different from how other parish councils are run but we hope through this, we can get greater community involvement and engagement and come up with approaches and solutions that are fit for purpose. But the council cannot do this on its own. Some of the issues and challenges that are raised by residents lay well outwith those that a council the size of SAPC would ever consider- but we do consider these and we punch well above our weight in terms of what we do and the breadth and depth of the work we get involved with. For example, we lobby hard on behalf of residents with local and national bodies to ensure what happens within the parish is fit for purpose and to the benefit of residents- for example, we have worked alongside the Guinness Trust to highlight issues raised by Guinness tenants relating to their housing management and we continue to push HCA and other agencies to get the best outcomes possible for the Ashland estate- no other body does this activity on behalf of local residents. The Cllrs have a wealth of expertise and experience that they bring to bear and we hope that, working alongside residents, we will continue to make a positive difference. Looking forward we know that we will be able to have a greater say in what happens within the parish in terms of, for example, the provision of open space maintenance. As MKC devolves some of the services that it currently provides, there is the opportunity for residents, working with SAPC, to shape the services that we want at the local level. These services need to be paid for and over the last three years, SAPC has continued to increase its precept so that we have the funds available to take over some services as and when the opportunities arise. The shift to managing services was initially planned to take place in 2017 but MKC has delayed this transfer. We continue to work with colleagues from MKC and other parish

councils and will keep residents informed on the timetable for this development. We have already started discussions with local service providers to ensure transparency and value for money as we move to directly commission our own services.

As I have mentioned, we are a publically accountable body and the impact of this is that we work within strict guidelines laid down by central government. To this end, I would like to thank Sue Key, our Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer, who ensures that we comply with all our legal and financial requirements. Much of this activity happens behind the scenes but anybody who has been to a SAPC public meeting or gone onto our website will see our policies, statement of accounts and minutes. Sue has decided that now is the time to retire from SAPC and all Cllrs wish Sue a long and happy retirement. Over the summer we will be appointing a replacement for Sue and there will be opportunities to meet with our new clerk once in post.

As noted at the 2017 APM, the council now has sole responsibility of the Village Hall (VH). Over the last twelve months, users will have seen developments at the hall that we hope have made it a more inviting space for local activities and events. As the sole and responsible owner SAPC, is developing both the way in which the VH is being used but also the terms and conditions for hire, to ensure that we meet all legal and health and safety requirements. Over time, our vision is that the VH will develop its role as a community hub and be used in innovative and exciting ways.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who are Cllrs on SAPC who have given so generously and freely of their time over the last twelve months. Being a member of SAPC can be challenging but Cllrs continue to work with and on behalf of residents, often quietly and under the radar for neither reward or praise and as Chair I would formally like to thank them for this and all the expertise and commitment that they bring. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew Harrington for his efforts whilst a member.

Finally, I would like to thank all the residents of Simpson & Ashland for everything that you do to make this small part of Milton Keynes such a great place to live. The activities that you have got involved in be it litter picking, contributing to and distributing newsletters, enhancing the open spaces and the like, and much more- all these are greatly appreciated.

Cllr David Pye
Chair
Simpson & Ashland Parish Council
May 2018