

A View from the District (July 2010)

No sooner had I sent last month's report, including details of the A14 Public Inquiry, than the new Government announced a Spending Review on all major projects and cancelled the Inquiry. The Parish Council put forward its objections for the record anyway, though it must now be extremely doubtful that the project will proceed in anything like its proposed form.

I was alerted by a sharp-eyed friend to a small paragraph in a City Council Committee agenda noting that the project to reduce the speed limit on the Huntingdon Road from 40 to 30 is to be shelved – just as the building programmes for NIAB and NW Cambridge get under way and make the case for a reduction even more compelling. I alerted Girton College, and two Fellows and I attended the meeting. As a result the City is recommending the County to re-think, and we are launching a new petition for a 30mph limit. Officers are arguing that they cannot recommend a 30 limit without radically changing the 'look and feel' of the road, requiring a complete re-surfacing. This is precisely the opposite of the arguments they employed while trying to make Girton an experimental 20mph area, without any change at all in road layout.

The Corporate Governance Committee was as dull – and as important – as ever. So many of the issues seem trivial; for instance our internal auditors spent ages telling us we were to move from a 'traffic light' assessment (ie 3 categories of appraisal, good, indifferent, bad) to a 'petrol gauge' system, with 4 categories a bit like the Cambridge degree division into 1, 2.1, 2.2 and 3. I cannot enthuse that this will revolutionise our self-assessment. We touched on the assessment recently completed on our IT provision: the report will go to the portfolio holder for his next meeting: I shall want to know what he makes of it.

This unfortunately clashed with a NW Cambridge workshop, so I only managed the second half of that. I joined a group looking at 'the community', with the site architect enthusing about his vision of an implausible utopia, and involuntarily opening up some big concerns in current plans, particularly with the model of a big supermarket plus (somehow!) a flourishing row of butchers, bakers and perhaps even candlestick-makers in viable competition.

I had hoped to get clarification on the statement by the Project Director in the Cambridge News that abandonment of the A14 proposals would be catastrophic to the NW Cambridge project, but there was not time: I have mailed him to ask about the issues as he sees them.

Climate change is now an integral part of our audit process, so the Climate Change Working Group meeting was more than usually interesting. It was pretty devastating to learn that the various ecological aspects of our building (for instance rainwater harvesting for irrigation and toilet flushing) have been non-functional almost from the start and that consequently our carbon footprint is nothing to boast about. Having raised at the last Council meeting our abortive Travel to Work plan (where it was treated as a joke) I raised it again; it provoked only long faces.

Our New Communities portfolio holder held a meeting to assess a paper on retail units in the new developments. We looked at the options: 'small' supermarkets (for some fairly generous value of 'small') in both NIAB and NWC against one large unit. We had appraisals from retail analysts: apparently community analysts don't exist so we had to assess for ourselves the community benefits. The portfolio holder proudly noted that in Swavesey a small supermarket had not ousted local shops: the fact that this was less than half the size of the proposed 'small' supermarkets did not deter him, and he has agreed to go out to consultation on small and large supermarkets, with no 'tiny' option.

I am no longer a member of the JDCC but attended the 14 July meeting when the initial NIAB plans were considered. These are plans for the rest of 'NIAB 1', inside the City boundary. I was allowed to present my concerns about the plans as they stand which do not adequately protect Girton. Some of my concerns were given short shrift (the Highways Agency has not raised objections so we can assume there can be no problems of congestion-induced delays in emergency service attendance); it was claimed that others were adequately covered. It will be a hard battle to protect Girton's rights. Cllr Bygott argued that some of the S106 money should be allocated to the Wellbrook Way Bowls Green; it was agreed this could be explored.

If you would like a fuller monthly report emailed to you please contact me at scdc@de-lacey.org and I shall add you to the list of recipients. If you have any District Council issues you would like to discuss please don't hesitate to ask me.

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