

A View from the District (December 2010)

Abbeyfield's 76-apartment close-care centre at Wellbrook Way is now under way. Abbeyfield have invited me to join a 'focus group' to liaise with their planners and I shall be delighted to do this. The ambitious plans include several facilities which they hope to be able to share with the wide community of Girton. Meanwhile I am still waiting for a date to discuss the development of the public space on the other side of Wellbrook Way with Taylor-Wimpey directors.

There was a Community Forum in the Cotton Hall on 27 November at which members of the District and County Councils and of Cambridgeshire Horizons were available to answer questions on the North-West Cambridge development. The main issue now is the proposed restriction on housing developments until improvements on the A14 are in place. It was fairly well attended though I saw almost no-one from Girton itself. There were however several County Councillors present, and among other things we discussed the ongoing efforts to put pressure on officers over the traffic conditions on the Huntingdon Road, and the implementation of the 30mph limit agreed two years ago and more.

Further afield, we still await any decisions on the Northstowe development. The abandoning of the A14 upgrade, and the closure of the Immigration Centre (with resulting loss of revenue), have both been significant setbacks to the team. It must now be doubtful that the project as originally envisaged can go ahead, though both Gallaghers and the Homes and Communities Agency are no doubt desperate to realise their capital. I shall be pressing wherever I can to ensure that whatever happens is the result of coherent planning and not a short-term bail-out.

On 25 November I attended a training session on risk management and the District Council's meeting. The former raised interesting issues where we do not seem to be working properly, and it will be up to the Corporate Governance Committee to monitor responses to these comments. I raised again our dysfunctional Planning website; and of course the government has now proposed major alterations in the planning process for local communities. This may add even more significance to the Girton Village Plan.

At the start of the Council meeting our Ecology Officer, Rom Mungovan, was symbolically presented with a Green Apple award for his outstanding work on improving the quality of the Cam in the Trumpington Meadows area. The major agenda item was the modified redundancy policy so hastily withdrawn from the last Council due to lack of consultation. I again proposed that as well as a safety net for the lowest-paid workers we needed a cap for the higher earners to protect our local tax payers, but without success. We also had an interesting motion asking central government to introduce the concept of a 'dynamic local centre', as a place where a food store would not be permitted, without going through the planning process, to open in a shop previously used for other purposes (at present all retail is classified together) An amendment removing the restriction to foodstores was accepted and the motion as a whole was approved. It remains to be seen if central government will be at all responsive.

At the end of November the new CEO of SCDC, Jean Hunter, paid Girton a visit. I had expected that within her busy schedule this would be something of a flying visit, but she gave me an hour's discussion of my various concerns over the health of the Council, and we then spent a second hour on a tour of the village looking at our achievements (our excellent facilities on the recreation ground, for example) and our concerns (Wellbrook Way Public Open Space included, of course). Only another engagement at Bourne obliged her eventually to leave.

The BBC hosted a panel discussion on the Guided Bus on 29 November, with my fellow Councillor Mike Mason on the panel. Very few of the audience questions received specific answers, and the occasion showed the community's anger at the way the project has been allowed to develop. Since each of the County Council and BAM Nuttall is convinced it has a watertight legal case against the other, we look set for a long legal battle, which cannot be for the good of our electors.

Finally some good news: SCDC has been battling for years to get central government to reduce the cost burden we bear over our equity share sheltered properties. Because of complex legislation we are obliged to buy these back at full market value at the end of a lease, but then give central Government up to 75% of the proceeds of the subsequent sale. Now we have

managed to get an agreement which will significantly reduce this burden, by removing over 200 of our properties from the scheme. Our officers are to be congratulated on their persistence.

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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