

## A View from the District (January 2011)

A fairly quiet period in which, I suspect, all local authorities are trying to come to terms with what the Coalition's approach to local government is going to mean on the ground. The cynical will be convinced that the main effect will be that many of the cuts will appear to be administered by Districts and Counties rather than central government; realists will be looking to ensure that Localism does not mean that pressure groups will be able to wield undue influence. It is too early to say what the effect will be on the big issues which affect Girton: Northstowe, the NW Cambridge developments, Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, the A14; as well as less obvious issues of infrastructure.

Three meetings are worthy of brief comment:

1. Planning. As the Government envisages significant changes in Planning policy, a draft Service Plan was adopted. This had quite a bit in it about cooperation with Parish Councils, something which has not been very obvious in the past, and I hope this will turn out to be more than just token meetings at inconvenient times and place to discuss nebulously broad issues. We also looked at 'Service Improvements & Performance Indicators', a heading which included a (very rosy) report on the new planning website. I am promised a meeting with officers to explore the many problems which I have identified (and which were not reported).

2. New Communities. The first issue here was the massive report into finding new areas for accommodating Gypsies and Travellers which has finally been published. Since the Government has not yet published its policy on this issue, the only decision taken was to remove a few of the proposed sites (including the University site) from consideration. The NIAB site is still in the list. We then looked at a proposed Water Cycle Strategy, which will be the blueprint for the infrastructure of all the proposed major developments. Councillors pushed for clarification and more details in some key areas, and the strategy will come back for further discussion next year.

3. Northstowe. This was a real damp squib: if the Northstowe Portfolio Holder did not have a rag-bag of other responsibilities he'd have nothing to do. The best he could manage was to endorse the Northstowe element in the Planning policy mentioned above. However, more recently the developers have produced a very upbeat report on their plans with more documents than I have currently been able to digest. The A14 remains a major stumbling-block.

A Conservative Councillor has resigned owing to pressure of work. This means that the Council is technically in No Overall Control with the Conservatives holding precisely 50. Cambourne will not simply be voting for a local Member: the outcome will affect the whole of South Cambridgeshire.

On 12 January there was the Corporate Governance Committee meeting which among other things was presented with the formal Letter from the external auditor, who noted that there had been an enormous improvement over the past 12 months and the letter consequently had a very different tone from last year's. This is very heartening.

If you would like a fuller monthly report emailed to you please contact me at [scdc@de-lacey.org](mailto: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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