

A View from the District (June 2011)

This month has seen examples of just what Localism means in practice, from the nuclear storage issue at King's Cliffe to the County Council overruling Barton's request for lower speed limits. Astoundingly, such effects are built into the very fabric of the Localism Bill: a briefing by the Local Government Association <<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/18402194>> makes grim reading. Our attempts to reduce speeds on the Huntingdon Road are also suffering in this regard, and I have asked the University if it will lend its weight as part of its plans for NW Cambridge.

Before the Council meeting we were invited to meet the new Chief Constable, who gave a very good account of himself. He has to find massive savings and there are to be significant structural changes, but he hopes to maintain the strength of PC and PCSO numbers (at least until the national review of PCSO funding in March 2012).

The District Council has held its AGM. A cabinet reshuffle has put, as Portfolio Holder for Sustainability Planning and Climate Change, one of the supporters of the recent motion against wind power, and it was suggested that he should be vice-chairman of the Climate Change Working Group but happily that was overruled. I was nominated by the Liberal Democrats as chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee but (rather to my relief) was not successful.

Under questions from the public the Council was asked 'In what way exactly would a wind turbine be judged differently to another structure of a similar size ... as regards visual impact or noise?' The very unsatisfactory answer was that harms would have to be outweighed by advantages, leaving it unclear whether this was uniquely a turbine issue.

The Planning Committee has been reduced by 1 to 14 members. The sole effect of this is to reduce the Liberal Democrat representation by 1. I am a substitute for the Independent Group's single seat, but am in any event entitled to speak to the Committee on any issue affecting Girton. There were several complex and searching questions from councillors. Since cabinet members had been boasting of their contacts with Ministers they were asked for reports on the conversations: we were told it saves paper not to provide them. We have also had a lot of boasts that our financial prudence means that our services will be unaffected by the cuts, but we discover that counselling is having to be offered to staff with advice on 'more efficient ways of living' and sympathy for those made redundant.

To end on a positive note: it was reported to the Council that our Revenues & Benefits officers are to be congratulated for managing to collect over 99% of rates and Council Tax over the past year, a magnificent achievement.

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.

Douglas de Lacey
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