

A View from the District (January 2012)

The major news is that SCDC officers working with the Parish Council's lawyers managed to finalise the transfer of the Wellbrook Way open spaces, and the first tranche of money to develop them, just before Christmas. Since then I have been discussing with the Landscape and Ecological Officers how the remedial planting should be handled, and with the Parish Council the The Corporate Governance Committee has met, starting with a briefing on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA). RIPA is often lambasted by the media as terrorist legislation now used against innocent citizens, but is actually legislation to **regulate**, and therefore to restrict, what official bodies can do. SCDC has been formally Inspected for its compliance with the Act and our performance is satisfactory. Of perhaps 400 investigations a year (mainly benefit fraud and fly-tipping) only a tiny handful require measures covered by the RIPA, and those (as well as many of the others) have generally resulted in successful prosecution.

The major item on our agenda was to approve a 'new look' presentation of our accounts, in plain English and without the bewildering accountants' conventions. It was designed for you the public, but I was not the only councillor to confess that now for the first time I think I understand our accounts. Our officers were warmly congratulated and I do hope you will take time to look at them at <http://tinyurl.com/6trkuum> (available as either MS Word or PDF).

We noted that our auditors' fees were significantly less than last year and were told that this was a direct result of the hard work of our own accounts staff.

We also looked ahead to how we are going to handle perhaps the biggest issue to hit SCDC since I joined. Central government has decided to solve the national problem of council housing by divvying up the debt run up by all councils and sharing it out equally (for some value of 'equally'). As we had no debt in this area, SCDC suddenly have to take on a £203M debt on top of all the retrenchment we are required to make. For the first time, therefore, we shall have to borrow money, and we discussed how we might handle this: pay off interest only and condemn our grandchildren to a nasty shock 30-40 years down the line, or what? Our committee will be at the forefront of the decision-making here.

Soon the new Northstowe application will be lodged, and controversy still surrounds the location of a new football stadium at either Trumpington Meadows or NIAB 2. Neither site really has adequate space, as in each case it would entail the removal of even more Green Belt land.

With the relaxation of the planning laws, we are seeing a number of applications for a Certificate of Proposed Lawful Use or Development, which bypass the normal planning scrutiny. There is nothing the District Council can do to prevent this, which is in danger of resulting in unsightly and uncontrolled development which may possibly impede neighbours' rights. The certificates will be detailed in the Parish Council's Planning agendas, but neither the District nor the Parish has the resources to notify neighbours by other means.

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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