

A View from the District (July 2012)

I make no apology for a rather long and technical report this month. As well as developments in the NW Cambridge plans, SCDC is about to embark on its most significant exercise for the next 2 decades – a new Local Plan which will control development in the District until 2031. By the time you read this the consultation will be well under way and it is imperative that all residents of the Village are involved. The Plan proposals impact on the village in at least five areas:

- The Plan proposes to ‘upgrade’ Girton’s status to ‘Minor Rural Centre’ (see below) which will allow more development here.
- At the same time the amount of development permitted in ‘Minor Rural Centres’ is set to increase significantly.
- It is suggested that industrial and commercial developments should be permitted in green-field land around villages.
- Proposals for the development of NIAB 2 will have big implications for Girton.
- The Plan includes a proposal to develop the field at the end of Cockerton Road with 15 new dwellings.

You will see that the implementation of all these ideas could radically change the identity of Girton (and other parts of SCambs too). The consultation period lasts until 28 September after which officers will assess all the arguments presented. Councillors will then decide on the elements of the Plan; or possibly go for a second consultation on the revisions. Given that it took us a meetings of 8 hours simply to go through the documents detailing the proposed questions (with all the appendixes setting out the detailed work, we probably had in excess of 2,000 pages), we are likely to be in for some lengthy discussions towards the end of the year. During the meeting I proposed a number of amendments, all but one of which were accepted by the PFH. That one was a request to revert to an earlier draft of a question on water management which had been thrown out by the Leader: the PFH agreed to reconsider the issue.

At present villages in SCambs are divided into 4 categories: ‘Rural Centres’, ‘Minor Rural Centres’, ‘Group Villages’ and ‘Infill Villages’. The names are not helpful but are used to decide what sort of development is deemed appropriate, from significant developments of up to 30 dwellings in RCs to no planned development at all for IVs. The grading is based on a number of criteria including transport, schools, facilities available and employment within the village, but takes no account of whether, for instance, the school is already at capacity. One proposal for the new Plan is that new categories should be included of Better Served Group Village, and villages close to the CGB.

When the new Plan is ready it will be inspected by the Secretary of State (SoS). It must be found ‘sound’ before it can be adopted, but whereas in the past if the SoS inspector did not approve, he/she would make binding recommendations, now he/she can only make suggestions, condemn it as unsound, and invite us to remedy it as we will. What about Localism? This allows communities (or, indeed, almost anyone) to propose development for all or parts of our village, but gives us no powers to forbid or prevent it.

Well, the Local Plan has rather dominated my thinking and my time this month, but other things have happened as well. The Government has issued a new A14 challenge and, incredibly, is raising again the possibility of a £1Bn spend. Following an article by him on the A14 I asked City MP Julian Huppert if we could explore areas of mutual concern, and we have had a very useful meeting.

An expertly-chaired Corporate Governance meeting took just over an hour to go through a very lengthy agenda which as well as the usual financial reports covered some significant procedural changes, and a discussion of the new Bribery Act. Difficulties in reading the text before us again raised the issue of the ugliness of the fonts SCDC insists on using. We are promised a review shortly.

The regular liaison meeting with County officers and members was also dominated by our Local Plan. In addition though we looked at the new arrangements for flood management – which can be summarised as new responsibilities for local councils but no new money. Girton Parish Council has recently sent its own flood report to the County Council and we await a response. We received a report from the Fire Service over its proactive fire and accident prevention programme, another on the Shadow Police and crime Panel, set up in anticipation of the changes after the election of Commissioners in November, and one on Neighbourhood Panels which appear to be something of a dying breed. Most significant was a paper on Cambridge Future Transport. None of the changes in bus provision following the withdrawal of subsidies affects Girton, but for villages which lose services the County is putting in temporary minibus services while officers try to assess need. For this purpose two new officers have been recruited.

The University has put a proposal to the City Council that the Community Centre and Storey's Field (both within the City boundary) should be managed by a Joint Venture between the City and the University, with the University maintaining control of all the remaining public spaces in the whole site, rather than handing over to the Councils; and the City is minded to agree. This was transmitted to the District Council at a very late stage, and since much of the public spaces will be in Girton Parish I have lodged an objection. Whatever the merits of the case neither the District nor the Parish should agree without careful consideration of all the implications for Girton. The University has also put out a press release about transport on the site, and I have asked for an urgent meeting with the director to discuss these issues.

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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