

A View from the District (January 2013)

Residents will have seen the new Post Office building which arrived before Christmas: we immediately received a complaint that no Planning Application has been lodged. However it appears that the Post Office does not need to do this and the building is now being kitted out ready for business.

The Councils (City, County and District) are working on a Greater Cambridge City Deal to be financed from central Government money. We are offered greater powers in exchange for economic growth. At present we appear to be rather junior partners: we shall not be a signatory to any deal agreed. Details are still very vague at the time of writing.

The Planning Committee has considered among other items the proposal to build 22 more dwellings at Wellbrook Way. The Parish Council had been critical of the design of the site, and I added a concern over the attempt to evade our criteria for affordable housing. I was very pleased that the Committee has agreed and rejected the application.

The Corporate Governance committee normally focuses on financial audits, but it also acts as a scrutiny committee on a number of other issues. In December we noted that the organisation which took over maintenance and repair of our Council properties earlier in the year had been audited and come out badly. We were assured that the problem was only over the communication of Key Performance Indicators, but noted that this means we have no evidence of how the service is actually working; and I had to report that one experience in Girton has not been good. We now expect a proper review of the service. In our ongoing battle against verbosity we suggested that a lot of the Council's reports may well be superfluous; we hope that our own Plain English Accounts might be a model for other services.

The Sustainable Energy Committee looked at the Green Deal. We all agree that it should be implemented here by local subcontractors, though it is not trivial to ensure this, and that we should undertake a stringent 12-month review. Communicating the project to residents will also be crucial for its success.

Early in January I was contacted by residents concerned at the demolition of the brick-clad asbestos bungalow in Hicks Lane preparatory to development. After a series of discussions with our own Enforcement officers, the Health and Safety Executive and the companies involved I am satisfied that adequate precautions are in place.

Also early in January I received a distressing email from our Tree Officer. As part of the regular inspection of trees with Preservation Orders on them she had noticed a large fruiting body at the base of the glorious London Plane tree in the Cambridge Academy of English grounds, and had advised investigation. A tree surgeon has now done a PICUS which I understand is an ultrasound scan across the base of the tree to determine the integrity of the wood, and unfortunately the result is that the tree is significantly decayed and in a very dangerous condition, and requires removal before leaf burst this spring. It is estimated that it is over 100 years old, but sadly it will have to be taken down some time in February. The Academy has done all it can, and I am sure we shall all mourn the loss of such a splendid specimen.

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
South Cambridgeshire District Councillor for Girton