

## **A View from the District**

Last month I mentioned the problems which our Scrutiny Committee has in holding Portfolio Holders to account. We met again on 7 March for an informal session to plan future projects, and it was an opportunity for us all to express dismay at the way in which we are being treated. We agreed that several areas needed attention, and I am chairing a working party looking at our website problems. I have already set in train an evidence-gathering exercise though the group has yet to meet. We are also very concerned still at the model for delivery of the South Cambs magazine, receiving reports that some of the deliverers receive as little as £2.50 per hour. Another group is investigating this.

Delivery of the latest issue of the magazine should now have been completed. Did you receive yours? If not I would like to know; as would the Council. They have issued a notice to that effect – in the magazine itself!

Girton is an active member of our Sustainable Parishes Energy Partnership. On 15 February SPEP celebrated winning the regional National Energy Action Community Footprint Award with a lunch at the Gamlingay Eco-Hub. The award is sponsored by British Gas and provides £2000 for SPEP to spend on further projects. The Eco-Hub is a re-vamped Village Hall with a wealth of innovative features from ground-source heat pumps and solar cells which earn a tidy annual income in the thousands, to fold-away bookshelves which can in seconds transform the hall into a functional library. I am hoping the community building at Wellbrook Way will emulate its successes.

Representatives of the Girton Town Charity and I have met a senior Planning Officer for an amicable discussion of the plans for the Wellbrook Way community building, as the sale of the land by SCDC to the Charity cannot proceed without acceptance of the outline plan. All looks set fair for speedy development now. I have also attended a “workshop” on the developing Local Plan, in which officers put before us a number of proposals which had emerged from the consultation and on which they wanted to follow Members’ lead. It was a challenging and enjoyable morning.

The Joint Development Control Committee meeting on 20 February looked as though it was going to be a very long one indeed with three major items for decision, including details of part of the NW Cambridge development. In the event we quickly reached agreement on all the major issues.

Council met on 28 February to agree our budget. Setting the budget is a very complex operation. We had first to approve the Corporate Plan, and based on that the Mid-Term Financial Strategy in order to achieve it. This is a political decision and there is no possibility of the leading Group not getting its way. The only point on which there was any significant debate was over whether we should fund this from reserves or by raising Council Tax. Because of our low tax base the Leader had received permission from central government to increase the rate by more than the 2% general cap and proposed 4.33%. A Liberal Democrat amendment to use reserves was easily defeated. The Liberal Democrats believe that the Tories wish to retain our reserves so that we can use them to make a contribution to the A14, a move which I would strenuously oppose.

We considered and approved a general pay policy statement and I was disappointed that, despite affirming that all our staff were paid the living wage, the Portfolio Holder was unwilling to include that in the statement. Since he several times confused “living wage” with “minimum wage” some of us were not confident he understood the issue.

Finally under matters financial we agreed to peg our own allowances to staff pay, though at the same time rescinding the restriction that no member could claim more than one special allowance; a change which benefits only those already on the highest allowance levels.

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.

*Douglas de Lacey*