

A View from the District

We are still coming to terms with the shocking news that Cllr John Reynolds died suddenly en route from an Australian holiday. John was an amazingly hard-working councillor who achieved a lot for Girton. I shall miss him and send my condolences to his family.

NW Cambridge has been high on my agenda with a number of meetings, from turning the first sod for the school to discussing traffic management during the construction of the Huntingdon Road access. From these I am developing deeper discussions with the University on governance and traffic through the site.

I have chaired another Standards hearing, this one involving cyber bullying. It is the first time I have really encountered the issue, and it is clear that some of the effects of social media are utterly pernicious. They also appear to produce a mentality similar to that of the mob; some of these people were doing things which I am sure they would not have dreamed of doing alone.

I have attended meetings of both Joint Committees: for Cambridge Fringes and for Northstowe. There was an uncontroversial application to the former to replace and refurbish the field station on the University Farm; but the real interest lay at Northstowe. The developers wanted to remove a condition specifying minimum room sizes, but instead of bringing the item to the October meeting, officers had asked the developers if they minded it being deferred until after the legal determination date. Mind? Of course not: as soon as they could they lodged an appeal based on our non-determination. So our meeting looked not at the issue of room sizes but at the way ahead. With an avid member of the public busily scribbling throughout, we carefully laid out our case for contesting the appeal, but our chances look slim. So yet another major plank of this 'exemplary' development slides into the morass. And now I see ministers are pushing to develop the site as quickly as possible, even before an upgraded A14 is ready to play its small part in managing the resulting congestion, and to do this they apparently wish to manage the development themselves (see the National Infrastructure Plan published on 2 December 2014 at tinyurl.com/mwkws3t). Will this be the end of the Northstowe JDCC? Watch this space.

Council met on 27 November, with only two significant items on the agenda, first to approve arrangements for the Greater Cambridge City Deal, a deal which one Councillor slated as a growth agenda which is merely predatory on our current residents. Since this is to be approved by City and County as well, the Leader was reluctant to allow amendments, but was overruled. The first change we wanted was to ensure that the public will always be able to challenge the executive by means of written questions. The draft allowed this 'at the discretion of the chairman' and we voted to remove this phrase. Then I pointed out that 'the proportionality principles' in the report would require one Independent on the Board, and suggested that that Independent should come from the Council with the largest Independent representation; namely SCDC. I lost of course but there was a lot of support, and I won a pyrrhic victory by having the words 'in accordance with the proportionality principles set out in paragraphs 19 and 20 of this report' excised. We also agreed to recommend (only – some of us wanted to insist) to the County Council that its appointed members should be drawn only from divisions in the Greater Cambridge area. We do not really want Greater Cambridge run by the Member for Wisbech or Brampton.

The other significant item was the scheme of delegation to officers for planning applications. A number of us argued that if a Parish Council and a District Councillor objected to one on valid planning grounds then it should automatically come before the Planning Committee, but

we were defeated by the proposal that officers should be able to veto that. Parish Councillors have been astounded in the past that we have unanimously recommended refusal of an application only to see it waved through by officers: the impression that Parish Council recommendations are simply ignored will unfortunately remain.

You may know that significant development is being planned NE of the City, including a new railway station at Chesterton. If you wish to have your say you can do so at www.scamborough.gov.uk/cnfeaap before Monday 2 February.

2015 will no doubt be a busy and interesting year. I hope for you it will be a happy and prosperous one.

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