

Monthly update for parish councils: November 2007

County Council meeting

There was no regular council meeting during November although there was an extraordinary meeting at which Keith Walters was elected leader. There will be a meeting in December.

Environment and Community Services

The big news from the Commission for Social Care and Inspection (www.csci.org.uk) is that Cambridgeshire has been awarded 1 star for the 6th straight year for its Adult Services. This is the bottom classification and it puts us sadly in the bottom 20%.

There is a bit of an issue around relating to the Guided Bus. Evidently it will have to pay business rates and this was not foreseen in the planning. There is the suggestion that it might be incorporated as a charity and so avoid such charges but that begs lots of questions about democracy and accountability.

Children and Young People's Services

The first competition for a new primary school is underway in Cambourne and it has shown up the scary side of the government's policy of diversity in education provision. The local authority gets a government t 'adviser' (Deloittes in this case) which has acted not as brokers but as head hunters drumming up interest from BAA and a baptist trust amongst others. We don't know who will stay the course and at some stage the Cambridgeshire itself will have to decide whether or not to enter the competition. If this is the future we should be worried.

The Adoption Service has just been inspected and achieved 3 'goods' and 1 'satisfactory' with inspectors saying that it was unrecognisable from 18 months ago, just before CYPS was formed and new managers were recruited. There must be a moral there for Adult Services.

And on a national level the government is insisting on high standards for new schools but reducing the funding. There is therefore to be a cross party resolution at December's council meeting calling on it to get real and to restore the cuts.

Corporate Services

The budget round has started and this year it's rather different because we are required to be more explicit with the way that what we plan to do reflects our corporate priorities (isn't it surprising that this hasn't always been the case?). The story is the same again though: an ungenerous grant from the government, an expected 5% cap on the increase in council tax, a mid-year spending 'crisis' and increasing upward pressures. It will not be an easy exercise.

I have attended a meeting of the Appointments Committee as the Council continues its search for a new Chief Executive and puts in place interim arrangements.

Police

The request from the Chief Constable for more funds for Cambridgeshire to cope with its obvious demography challenges has resulted in some action. Julie Spence and Keith Walters as Chair of the Police Authority met the home secretary in London, 21 Nov 07.

Local issues

I attended a meeting of Histon and Impington Climate Change Action (www.hicca.org.uk) when it was focusing on transport. I gave an apolitical overview of the guided bus, the TIF bid, Northstowe and the A14 development. I would be happy to repeat this in other fora.

I convened and attended a meeting with SCDC planners, local parish councilors and Ken Hart, the owner of the Histon station building. It was a very constructive meeting and Mr Hart has now prepared plans showing how this site could be developed to deliver a commercial enterprise in the station building itself together with 5 houses.

I attended the Guided Bus local liaison forum (Histon City). The agenda was short and largely addressed noise related issues.

Forthcoming meetings and events

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| 5 Dec 07 | South Cambs 'in your patch' |
| 11 Dec 07 | Cambridgeshire CC council meeting |
| 17 Dec 07 | Development Control meeting |
| TBA (Jan 07) | Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon North) |
| TBA (Jan 07) | Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon City) |

And finally ... I've spent most of the last month criss-crossing the country as a part of my day job. I am a part of a team delivering training to entrants in the Research Councils of the UK business plan competition. This is an initiative to encourage researchers at universities to think about ways in which they can transfer their technologies to the private sector and it's taken me to several English locations and to Scotland and to Wales later today. I am amazed at the quality of the technology which our universities are producing and especially by the way that different technologies come together to deliver products and services of real value. We are always told how Teflon resulted from the Apollo program in the US and believe me this happens continually as science is developed in one area and finds application somewhere completely different. Billions (yes billions) of our tax pounds are spent via the research councils so it's good to see benefits being delivered.

David Jenkins

County Councillor; Cottenham, Histon and Impington

david.jenkins@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

H: +44 1223 236232 M: +44 7739 758859