

## **Monthly update for parish councils: March 2009**

### **County Council and Cabinet meetings**

There was a County Council meeting during the month. It was shorter than the previous one but it still seemed to find a way of dragging on into the afternoon. I had placed a written question and in response was told that there are over 100 new posts in the 2009 budget.

### **Environment and Community Services**

The guided bus saga continues with another strange announcement: that the Arbury Link will after all be built by BAM Nutall. The relationship between CCC and BAM Nuttall seems a little strained.

Following the proposal in the Lib Dem's alternative budget the Council has asked consultants to look at the way that it contracts home to school transport.

The Transport Commission has continued its work. It appears to have completed its hearings in Cambridge and is now out on the road and will next sit in St Ives.

EERA has recommended that a new railway station be built at Chesterton with £22.6 million from regional funds. This is excellent news for those who live north of the city. We now have the prospect of reliable journey times to the station.

### **Children's Services**

Concern has been expressed following the serious case review of 'child A' and the news that this is just one of four such reviews currently active in the County. Officers are responding and corrective actions are being implemented.

There was mixed news about Homestart. This voluntary agency does excellent work supporting families at the earlier stages of any difficulties. After losing its funding a package has been put together to enable it to survive this year but the Council is not yet willing to make any longer term commitment.

The SATS test results for primary schools have been released. Many question their value, they might even be damaging to our children's education, but they nonetheless exist so it was good to see our 3 tested schools scoring well.

### **Adult and Community Services**

It seems that we have another contractual difficulty. This time it's with Verry Construction who is building the new library. I've forgotten exactly when this project should have been finished, there have been ongoing problems including one relating to asbestos, some of which could not have been foreseen and the library is not now expected to open before the summer.

### **Corporate Services**

The council has received its last CPA rating under the old system. It continues to be a 3 star council (the max score is 4) and is said to be 'improving well'.

## Local issues

Several Cottenham residents have contacted me with concerns about a plot behind Twentypence Road. There is concern that it might become an illegal travellers' site. I have advised them that the parish council is alert to the issue and that appropriate action will be taken should the need arise.

There was panic in mid week about a tree in Orchard Park which, it was feared, would have to be felled to allow the Guided Bus through. I chaired the liaison forum at which the Guided Bus people themselves saved the day when they tabled drawings to show that this would not be necessary. Bravo!

Matt Bradney and I met Histon and Impington parish councillors and Council bus officers to review the situation following the decision by Myalls to withdraw its Sunday 106 service. It was not encouraging; it is not easy but we (the Council) seem unwilling (or unable) to exercise any significant influence over Stagecoach.

## Forthcoming meetings and events

1 Apr 09	CGB local liaison forum (Meadows Community Centre, 1930)
14 Apr 09	Histon etc neighbourhood panel
20 Apr 09	South Cambs Area Joint Committee
23 Apr 09	CCC Development Control

And finally ... the government and local councils are doing a lot of work in the run up to the elections in June to persuade people to stand in them. What they never talk however are the perks because there aren't any. That's not 100% true: if you're a county councilor you get free coffee in the members' lounge and you can park for free at Shire Hall. And if you're lucky you might get invited to an event with free food and drink.

And so it was for me last month when I was invited to join the Council's table at the Cambridge News Business Awards dinner at Kings College. Kings has a reputation for good food and I was not disappointed. The event itself was attended by a broad mix of Cambridge's 'great and good', I see lots of the same faces at the various networking events I attend in the city. The awards themselves were mainly 'typical' Cambridge high-tech companies. The exceptions were Marshalls, which won the lifetime achievement award (which was sponsored by CCC), and Citycare Services, which provides social care services to the County Council and which won the business women of the year award for its co-founders. This last award was refreshing and demonstrates that there are more ways to business excellence than the venture capital/technology route with which Cambridge seems to be obsessed.

Both this monthly report and the ones for previous months are on my website.

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