

Monthly update for parish councils: May 2008

We saw a new organisation of the administration in May as the Tories elected their and the Council's new leader. Out went the two level hierarchy of the previous leaders and in came a flatter structure with a deputy leader with no apparent responsibility; and out went 8 Policy Development Groups (PDGs) with strange names and in came 5 with delightfully simple ones. The PDGs themselves have been increased in size to give all councillors a chance to participate which suggests some rather long meetings as everyone has a say.

I went on a 'twinning visit' to Kreis Viersen with the Chief Executive and a small handful of other councillors. It was interesting and enjoyable but I wonder why we have such arrangements. They are only worthwhile if we make an effort to learn from them; that requires a deliberate program which in these days of perpetual budget pressures seems difficult to engineer.

County Council meeting

There was a council meeting in May, the annual meeting of the council, when we got a look at the new Leader and the new Cabinet.

Allan Craig of Impington asked a question about the increasing problem of overnight parking of HCVs in residential areas in general and in Cambridge Road, Impington in particular. He got the usual non-committal response and I will work with residents to take a related petition to the AJC in July.

The Lib Dems moved 2 motions at the meeting. The first related to the proposed 'eco-town' development at Handley Grange and received all party support. The second related to the Building Schools for the Future program which imagines giving contractors 10 year deals. We proposed, on getting advice relating to similar contracts, reducing that to 5. This motion was rejected.

The Lib Dems also moved an amendment to the motion setting up the new PDGs which would require them to meet in public. This also was rejected.

Environment and Community Services

The big news on the month was the presentation of the congestion charging 'consultation'. The County Council has conducted 3 'consultations: one over the Internet, one through focus groups and one by structured market research. The results seem inconclusive but largely said that people who either travel into or live within Cambridge are anti and that those who don't are not but those who are anti could change their mind if various undefined carrots were made available! There will be more on this in July but the timetable now seems to be managed such that there can be little substantive progress before next year's elections.

The Lib Dems challenged the Council's latest speed limit policy through Scrutiny. The new policy now requires average speeds to be already below 20 mph before it will support a 20 mph speed limit (in the absence of other speed reduction measures). Unfortunately a majority on the Scrutiny Committee did not see the need to refer this policy back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

We are still waiting for progress regarding the reorganization of Adult Social Care. Until we do the Chief Executive continues to be the responsible offer.

Corporate Services

We expect to interview candidates for the head of Press and PR during June.

Local issues

Democracy triumphed when the Transport Appeals Committee upheld the objections against withdrawal of the school bus services between Girton and Oakington and Impington Village College. This has been a sorry example of poor consultation, relevant facts being ignored and a policy based on 1940s legislation. I trust the Rampton appeal will also be successful.

I have been asked to initiate a Community Call for Action by Oakington residents concerned about lack of action with respect to the closure of the road across the old airport to Longstanton on the one hand and a reluctance on the part of the authorities to enforce the through traffic restrictions on the other.

And just a thought ... I've been looking at the guided bus junction across Station Road in Histon. It is very wide and invites motorists to travel at speed. I know it's being wise after the event but shouldn't we use such developments as a part of our overall plan to reduce speeds? The Council is always telling us that we can't have lower speed limits (see above) without physical measures so why not use such a new development to implement them?

Forthcoming meetings and events

TBA	Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon City)
16 Jun 08	Development Control meeting
19 Jun 08	Rampton school, bus appeal
TBA	Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon North)

And finally ...I took a break during the month and enjoyed 4 days in Marrakech. Listening to the talk there of new hotels and other tourism-related developments I was pleased to do so before it loses its character. Today it still has lots with a labyrinth of narrow traffic-free lanes in the Medina, an open central area surrounded by cafes and packed with food stalls and street entertainers in the evening and many 'riads', traditional houses based on courtyards and private from the street. Many of these riads are now small hotels and we stayed in one and it was an experience to step out of the bustle of the streets into the tranquility of its courtyard. One lasting memory though was walking home at night: narrow streets, inadequate lighting and clearly a tourist/foreigner but feeling perhaps safer than I would feel on Quayside in Cambridge on a Saturday night.

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