

Monthly update for parish councils: October 2007

County Council meeting

There was a long council meeting in October. In addition to an update on progress relating to the search for a new Chief Executive there was some fairly charged debate of the Council's recent Corporate Assessment, of the CSCI report of its Older People's Service and the TIF 'congestion charge' submission.

I took two opportunities to raise local issues: firstly to bemoan the total disregard of the Council of the impact of the guided bus related road closure on the local economy; and secondly to challenge the Council's assertion that because it did not need to knock down the Histon Station building it therefore did not need to honour its pledge to provide deliver a car park.

Environment and Community Services

The guided bus team finished its work on the Oakington crossing on time. Well done to those involved. It's interesting to note now that what used to be a traffic-slowing railway crossing is now a wide open ultra-smooth junction which might encourage traffic to speed up and perhaps to beat the lights.

There were guided bus liaison meetings for both Histon north and Histon City during the month neither of which I was able to attend.

I attended a presentation given by the Northstowe promoters of their current plans. It all made good sense, especially on the climate change side, but was inevitably superficial and when the detail comes out we will find out where cost considerations collide with our desire to build a sustainable community.

The Council has submitted its TIF bid to the government with all sorts of qualifications including 'we are not committed to anything and if we go ahead we may change the charging model anyway'. Conservative councilors from north of the County refer to it as 'poll tax on wheels'. It is now consulting.

Children and Young People's Services

The results of the Councils JAR (Joint Area Review of service for children and young people) were released at the October cabinet. Cambridge shire has good children's services and scores 3 stars. I would like it now to be looking at what it needs to do to get up to 4 stars (excellent).

I attended a briefing meeting of the members of the City North (which includes Histon and Impington) and Cottenham and Swavesey locality teams. These are the people who deliver the non-education part of children's services.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Assessment assesses 'how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities'. It is

not about its delivery performance per se but about the framework within which delivery can take place. It is a key determinant of the Council's Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) star rating. Cambridge shire's is assessed as performing 'adequately' and scores 2 on a scale 1-4.

The budget season is about to start. There are new requirements this year so that we are not having BAPs (Budget Advisory Panels) but Integrated Planning Briefings. Whatever, we begin the process in November. The word on the streets is that it will be difficult. The settlement is not exactly generous, we already look like exceeding budget this year before we make cutbacks and without a Chief executive we're a bit rudderless.

I participated in the long and short list interviews in the Chief Executive search.

Local issues

We saved the Histon station building! Well done to Pene Nudds for all the work which she put in and thanks to Ken Hart the landowner for demonstrating a willingness to go along with the community as long as his financial objectives could be met. In the end I'm not sure why the guided bus team suddenly admitted that it was not necessary to knock down the building, this had never been assumed to be the case and the Inspector only ever said it may be knocked down to build a car park. But the sequence of the threat of judicial review, involvement of the Council's financial officers instead of guided bus people and the interest shown by Ken Hart and the owners of the adjacent site seemed at last to get people to think about what was possible and not just what was easy. Anyway, well done all round.

The bad news in the month however was the way that the Council ignored the local traders and the impact of the closure of Meadow/Gatehouse/Park Lane on the local economy. The Council did not look at the data offered, did not talk to any of the traders and did not acknowledge that it should take a wider view of the community impact of its decision.

Forthcoming meetings and events

6 Nov 07	Safer routes to School briefing
6 Nov 07	Northstowe JDCC informal/training meeting
7 Nov 07	Histon station informal planning meeting
20/21 Nov 07	Northstowe JDCC (to be confirmed)
26 Nov 07	South Cambs AJC
TBA	Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon North)
TBA	Cambridge Guided Bus Liaison (Histon City)

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