

Monthly Report for Parish Councils – February 2008

It seems February is an absolutely crazy time at Council – this year worse than last. There were meetings galore. From Budget meeting, to Cabinet meetings. This was the first month ever that I have been to Shire Hall every working day. Even December wasn't as bad as this!

There was a **Full Council** meeting this month. It is always the biggest meeting of the year because it is the Budget Meeting, or this year it is called the Integrated Plan. As stated in previous reports, this is the first year that the priorities and targets have been aligned to the budget. We also have a 3 year budget in place now, so we can plan a bit further ahead. The meeting was a very long one, and I have made the suggestion that we have a separate meeting for the budget, sorry Integrated Plan, as we didn't get to the Integrated Plan until rather late in the day, and as the meeting went on until about 6ish there were some pretty tired faces. The debate was good and healthy. The Liberal Democrats once again put an alternative budget in, all be it a little late for proper scrutiny, but it is extremely helpful, and we remain one of the only County Councils to go through that process. The Administration have invested in Adult Social Care and have made this one of the top 5 priorities (if not the top) for the next year.

Gatehouse Lane/Park Lane – you may have noticed that the road re-opened on the 22nd. I appreciate better than most the problems caused by this closure and the issues it has caused the local community, so I was extremely relieved when they opened it on the date they said they would.

Eco-Towns – this continues to rumble on, when there are any significant things to report, I will. We are now waiting to hear which proposals will be on the short list from government. The current feeling and thoughts are that a site near St. Neots might be the best for all. The area are looking for development and it would have little impact on the enormous growth facing Cambridge and the sub region. Government have said they will release the short list in March – don't hold your breathe – although they are very keen to get this shoved through. A letter has been sent to CLG (Communities and Local Government Department) stating our concerns and fears. We await a response.

On the issue of the growth agenda some figures for you to ponder on the Earith/Mepal gravel plan:

The total reserve would be 44 million tonnes. Of this the existing permitted reserve is 20 million tonnes- the estimated reserve of the proposed allocation is 24 million tonnes, from this total about 28 million tonnes is expected to be worked by 2026 (the Plan Period) [i.e. 8 million tonnes above the permitted reserve.]

The reserves will generate about 1.4 million Lorries in the Plan Period. [One lorry load = 20 tonnes]

It takes 3 lorry loads to build a house - although much of the sand and gravel produced will go into other construction projects as well.

Audit Commission – the direction of travel statement was released this month. This is the statement by the audit commission giving us an indication of how we are doing as an authority. The statement said that we are improving in many key areas, I was particularly pleased to see some recognition for performance management, which of course has been my thing for 6 months. The other pleasing thing for me personally was our rating for Recycling. We are one of the best in the country and we continue to improve, this of course fits into my portfolio, but as I have only had it since December can claim absolutely no credit. We also had a very good rating for our use of resources from the commission. We did of course get another poke in the chest about Adult Social Care. Things are starting to improve in Adults, but this was not reflected in the statement. They said, quite rightly so, that things need to improve further. All areas had been improving well or good but the commissions view on Adults pulled the statement down to Improving Adequately.

Cabinet - there were 2 Cabinet meetings this month. The first being on the 1st February. This was debated at full council and the bulk of the meeting centred on the budget. There were a few other things on the agenda like the formal setting up of a Cambridge Fringes Joint Policy Committee, Trading Units (whether they should be moved back into the main budget). The meeting of the 26th had a much larger agenda. I won't list everything, because you might nod off, but the highlights were:

Budget Monitoring Report – as the audit commission said our use of resources etc. is very good.

Building Schools for the Future – although a Fen project, there will be a time that this will arrive in South Cambs. This project delivers state of the art schools for our children.

LAA – this continues to be on the tip of everyone's tongue. Work is continuing towards this tight timeline. The vision for Cambridgeshire has been completed and will go to the LAA board this month.

Adult Social Care – an excellent Scrutiny report into the Information System used. All the recommendations were approved. This was a very good example of how Scrutiny should be.

Guided Busway – a look at what we are going to do for maintenance of the guideway. Obviously it has a warranty with Nuttals, which is 2 years, but we were looking at routine maintenance etc. It was agreed that the contract should be added to the existing Highways contract with Atkins.

The meeting was a long one but I felt it was the best Cabinet meeting I had been at. Debates were useful and to the point.

Royal Town Planners Institute Award – I know this is a bit of trumpet blowing but I was really chuffed to win the RTPi award for climate change. The award was for the joint working of CCC and Donarbon on the design for the new waste recycling centre at Waterbeach. I was the lucky soul to go up on stage, but I was announced as Cllr. John Reynolds!!! Took the shine of a little but winning an award like that demonstrates the great work the team are doing.

Cambridge Evening News Business Awards – I was extremely privileged to be one of the judges on the awards this year, in my Councillor capacity. I had a great day; it truly is fantastic what some people are doing. I was particularly pleased to see the Barclays award entrants. These were mainly Princes Trust or Start up businesses – very impressive. I can't tell you who won, you'll have to read it in the paper.

Breakfast with Hazel Blears – I have been attending the Leadership Academy with the Government agency IDeA. It dawned on me at that academy that I am one of the youngest Cabinet members of a County Council in the Country. Because of that I was invited to a breakfast meeting with Hazel Blears MP. She now runs the CLG department. The meeting was entirely about how Councillors can be supported more. She was interested to know how I fit in a family, business, council and cabinet – my response was I don't sleep much. The government are looking at how councillors can be supported more, not just financially but resource wise too. As an ex-councillor she understood all the issues instantly and was listening to everything we had to say. I hope some good things come from it. I had a similar invite from Eric Pickles her Conservative opposite, but I was unable to make that one – time issues.

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