

Annual report for parish councils; 2008/09

A personal note

It has been a very busy year. I reduced my day job to 3 days a week so that I could properly attend to my County Lib Dem Leadership role as well as my regular Councillor responsibilities. But I then got myself appointed as a 'lay member' on Cambridgeshire Community Services and a member of the East of England regional assembly which have laid further claims on my time.

It has however continued to stimulate. I meet new people, I face new challenges and I continue to learn. This time next year I'll be standing for re-election (or otherwise) and I would not change the last 3 years.

2007/2008 in retrospect

Police

The local police liaison meetings have continued through the year and have generally been well attended. There have been manpower changes recently which are unsettling and the spate of vandalism in Histon and Impington and the new problems in Arbury Park are a worry. I have attended the problem solving meetings with the police to address these matters but it does seem that there are deep seated issues related to the lack of provision for young people in our villages.

The other development during the year was the appointment of PCSO Lee Page to Impington VC's staff. This appointment was not made because of any specific problems at the school but as an aid to helping students to come to terms more easily with authority and their responsibilities in the outside world. By all accounts Lee has been well accepted and I have seen a commendation which he has recently received for specific good work.

Corporate Services

The Cabinet again opted for a 5% council tax increase but balanced the books with a range of cuts. The Lib Dems proposed an alternative which went through full scrutiny; it would have mitigated some of the cuts and ended up with a tax rise of just 4.8%. Whether it would have worked of course we'll never know.

The Council received several reports from the audit commission. 3 specifically relate to Corporate Services. In its Corporate Assessment its rating was downgraded from a 4 to a 2, its Use of Resources score was raised to a 4, excellent and its Direction of Travel remains 'adequate'. Use of Resources is essentially a technical measure and reflects well on the quality of the officers in OCS.

Environment and Community Services

The Guided Bus project seems to have spent the year annoying people. It annoyed the people of Oakington because it would not give them a turning circle and it annoyed the traders of Histon because it closed the road into the village for 4 months. And it annoyed just about everybody because it seemed indifferent to the fate of the Histon station building which was later saved.

The big news though was TIF, the Transport Innovation Fund, which would give the Council access to about £500 million to spend on transport projects just as long as it

implemented 'congestion charging'. This was announced with some fanfare but resulted in some apparent disharmony in the ruling party. The Council has since been 'consulting' and it remains to be seen whether or not it has the courage to continue.

The Council did at last start to worry about climate change and all Council policies must now refer to their impact on climate change. Unfortunately the TIF proposals were wildly at odds with the challenges presented by the government's commitments for 2025.

There was another issue which has come to the fore in the last weeks and that's the school buses from Rampton and Oakington to Cottenham Primary School and Impington Village College respectively. The Council has decided that the improved footpaths along the routes are now safe for students to walk to school. Parents disagree and it's difficult not to side with them. Matt Bradney and I are working together to get the Council to change its mind.

Children and Young Peoples' Services

There were two big developments during the year: the County's Joint Area Assessment (JAR) and Building Schools for the Future (BSF).

The JAR assesses the Council's performance alongside partner agencies and Cambridge again came out 'good'. It is 'excellent' in a number of areas, including fostering which has been transformed, but also rated 'adequate' in children's social care and this could be a limiting factor in future JARs.

BSF is a major national capital program to renew the country's school estate. It's an exciting project and Cambridgeshire has begun to participate with new schools now in the process for Fenland. There's little controversy except that counties are expected to form Local Education Partnerships (LEPs) to design and build the schools. There is scope for the LEPs also to be involved in education provision which we will need to watch carefully.

Planning and the growth agenda

The growth agenda has now moved to centre stage and is being managed through a number of joint bodies which bring together variously the County Council, South Cambs and the City. There is a Joint Cambridgeshire Integration Committee of all 3 councils and there are joint development control committees for the 'southern fringes' and for Northstowe. I sit on the latter committee. Progress has been slow so far and the Northstowe draft plan submitted by the developers has been roundly criticized.

Arbury Park might be seen as a microcosm, a small development to demonstrate that we know how to do such things well. It does not bode well for the future with poor infrastructure delivery, inadequate provision for the lifestyles of the future and an early issue of anti-social behaviour.

Parish issues

I would not claim too much success with many of the local issues which I have championed. However there have been some modest gains. I have been closely involved, along with Matt Bradney, in:

- The campaign to save the Histon Station building

- The plan to control Cottenham traffic (speeds and HCVs)
- B1049/A14 traffic management, especially speeding between Cottenham and Histon;
- facilitating better cross council activity regarding travellers' issues
- The campaign to prevent the closure of Assessment Unit in Histon
- Safer routes for cyclists into Cambridge on both sides of the A14
- Safer routes to school in Oakington and Histon and Impington and Cottenham
- Guided bus issues and saving the school buses
- Overnight parking of HCVs in residential areas especially Cambridge Road, Impington
- Traffic management, parking and travel to Histon Football Club
- Anti-social behaviour, especially in Histon and Impington
- The campaign to get better consideration given to the local economies during the construction of the Guided Bus
- and several other minor and/or confidential matters

I have continued to encourage the various councils to work together in cross council meetings (county, district and parish) for Cottenham, Rampton and Oakington and Westwick and for Histon and Impington. The joint working group is an excellent example and is doing good work.

There is no doubt that I could do more and I look forward to making the next council year more productive than the last.

Outlook for 2007/08

I will endeavour to respond to what's important in Cottenham, Histon and Impington, Rampton and Oakington and Westwick but I would be surprised if this did not include the following (which is the same as I said last year):

- traffic plans for the villages (again): looking to developing coherent plans and not just responding to short term funding opportunities;
- Northstowe: making sure that this development does not do irreparable damage to the villages that border on it. I will specifically be looking to ensure appropriate green belt separation is implemented;
- local transport: finding ways to make public transport more accessible and, if possible, ensuring that the Guided Bus actually makes a net positive contribution to the villages through which it travels;
- road systems: ensuring that new and existing road systems actually serve the people that use them, thinking especially about the B1049 and the A14 junction. I continue to think that this is unsafe and ineffective and we should get some improvements implemented;
- cyclists: making sure that whatever is planned for cyclists is sensible and safe and actually does contribute to the objective of encouraging more cycling. (this point applies equally to walkers);
- schools: being ready to support our excellent local schools should they need extra support in their dealings with the County Council;
- cross council activity: working with colleagues on South Cambs District Council on issues in which we both have an interest including waste management and planning issues; and

- social care for both adults and children: ensuring that big government ways don't get in the way of addressing personal issues

Please contact me directly if you have any questions and/or comments regarding the above.

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