

A View from the District (March 2010)

On 25 February the Council met, primarily to set its annual budget. This was presented as a truly conservative budget: risk-averse, cutting millions off our spending yet somehow managing to meet all our needs. The leader of the LibDems claimed on the contrary it was an extremely risky budget: reductions in staff would increase the risks of delay in planning applications and planning of new communities, and yet at the same time still facing the risk of being capped. However, he put forward no alternative. My own major concern is the very great discrepancies between our last year's budget estimates and actual spending, with enormous overspends on items like agency staff and consultants, equipment purchases, and 'other'(!). Correspondingly there are huge underspends, and the suspicious may think these indicate reduced value to our residents rather than prudent pruning by managers. The budget as approved proposes a smidgeon under 3% increase; about the same as the other authorities who bid for bits of your Council Tax. Our tenants were also awarded a 2.7% rent increase. It could have been worse.

The Chief Executive, Greg Harlock, has announced that he is resigning 'in my own best interests and those of the authority'. He will work a six month period of notice.

We have a little more information on the breakdown of negotiations over the partial merger with Uttlesford, though no indication as to what follows now.

At the end of February SCDC dished up two interesting surprises. After months of pushing I was delighted to learn that the planning application for the play area on Wellbrook Way had finally been approved. But the Decision Notice adds five pages of conditions which are likely to delay procedures. Wimpey have agreed to pull the stops out to try nonetheless to achieve everything by 31 March. And for the Planning Committee another bombshell: an application that an eyesore derelict caravan which the Parish and District Councils have been trying to get moved for years has now been in situ so long that the owner has applied to have the use legalised and officers seemed to think this would be straightforward. However, neighbours deny the owner's claims and so we have a messy situation developing which I shall need to monitor carefully.

Plans to 'consider the future management maintenance and adoption of the proposed sustainable drainage system (SuDs) that will serve the NIAB development in the North West Quadrant' have just been announced and will be decided on by the Environmental Services PFH. I am grateful that Girton Parish Council has a qualified, retired water engineer among its number who can advise me on such matters. Future failure of NIAB's drainage could be catastrophic for Girton.

If you would like a fuller monthly report emailed to you please contact me at scdc@de-lacey.org and I shall add you to the list of recipients. If you have any District Council issues you would like to discuss please don't hesitate to ask me.

Douglas de Lacey
South Cambridgeshire District Councillor for Girton