

A View from the District (June 2010)

The Law specifies that a Parish Council must meet within 14 days of its election. Hence this report (based on my report for the Parish Council Agenda) is written early.

Annual General Meetings are generally very dull trawls through the necessary business of re-electing committees and receiving reports; and so it proved for SCDC. The annual report from the Leader of the Opposition noted that the model of 'strong leadership' which we are supposed to have embraced has yet to be demonstrated. The decision to wrest almost all control of sub-committees from the opposition, including the Scrutiny Committee, is hardly a manifestation of strength, but as I rather feared has led to my losing my place on the Cambridge Fringes Joint Development Control Committee. I shall however play as full a part on it as an ordinary Councillor as I am able.

Our Standing Orders have prevented Cabinet members interfering in certain key committees. We were asked to change this. I asked what the supposed benefits were; the only answer I received was that it was 'not a problem'; hardly a ringing endorsement for the change. Others pointed out that if Cabinet was doing its job properly its members would not have time to sit on other committees. But it was meekly voted through.

Then we considered petitions. Councils are now required to specify the number of signatures necessary (and the County has decided on a minimum of 15,000). 100 was the recommendation; we argued that even this is unreasonable and managed to reduce it to 50. As was pointed out, with some of our communities only numbering tens of people this is still a very stiff barrier to getting local issues onto the Council's agenda

On 28 May I attended a half-day conference on Travellers' health and wellbeing organised by Histon Early Years Centre. Like many other Traveller issues it is a vexed and difficult one. Not least of the benefits was getting to know the SCDC Traveller Liaison Officer who is already now helping me to look at options for the caravans parked on the Oakington Road plot opposite Manor Farm: they have been a problem for the Parish Council for many years.

Finally, the A14 Public Inquiry terms of reference have been set and were explained at a Pre-Inquiry Meeting on 24 May. The timetable is terribly tight: Statements of Case must be in by 8 June and Proofs of Evidence by 29 June. Happily we have been awarded a short extension, and I am hoping that we can share the presentation of our case with Histon and Impington. I have received a detailed response from the Highways Agency to the Parish Council's initial objection to the A14 Draft Orders: it does not answer our concerns.

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