

Councillor Column – February 2010

The Gamlingay Division comprises the 13 Parishes of Arrington, Barrington, Croydon, Great Eversden, Lt Eversden, Gamlingay, Lt Gransden, Haslingfield, Harlton, Hatley, Longstowe, Orwell & Wimpole.

Your Councillors are always ready to help. If you have any questions about these - or indeed any other - matters, please do not hesitate to contact County Councillor Sebastian Kindersley on 01767 651982 or skindersley@hotmail.com or write to the Manor Barn, East Hatley, SG19 3JA. District Councillor Bridget Smith is on 01767 650510 or bridget@glockling.com and District Councillor Liz Heazell is at 01223 870289 or on liz.heazell@btinternet.com

Things environmental:

www.easternCRI.org is a new website which is a very good starting point for discovering if you are entitled to any financial help in insulating your home. There are lots of grants available but this website will also tell you how much it will cost to insulate your home even if you are not entitled to a grant. Shockingly 60% of homes in our region do not have insulation which obviously has a huge effect on the amount you pay to heat your home and your carbon footprint.

Similar to the car scrappage scheme which has been quite successful is the newly launched boiler scrappage scheme. If your boiler is one of the old style energy inefficient ones you can claim £400 toward the cost of a new one which will be far cheaper to run and far better for the environment. Ring 0800 512012 for further help and the energy savings trust website has lots more information

The Children's Trust.

As Member Champion for children and young people Bridget Smith now sits on the new Children's Trust at Cambridgeshire County Council which runs all services for children and young people within the county. They have just had an Ofsted inspection on how well they safeguard children at risk and were deemed to be satisfactory. Children's services are about to face huge funding challenges with a 25% reduction in their budgets across the board in the coming 5 years and an even more worrying 33% cut in youth services. This is of great concern to us as we have fought very hard for our youth club in Gamlingay and do not want to see it put at risk by the threat that limited resources may be redirected to areas of new development.

Village Warden Scheme and voluntary work

Liz Heazell writes: "We have been putting pressure on the South Cambs Cabinet member for Housing to endorse the great work done by village warden schemes, including the Haslingfield team. Paid village wardens supported by Trustees and volunteers do sterling work supporting people in their own homes as long as they wish. Our wish for his endorsement carried about because he has proposed to cut their council grants in half. One scheme is already fearing that this may mean closure, with obvious pressure on other services just when the County is also threatening cuts to adult care. Unfortunately at SCDC, this is a direct casualty of the loss of money from the capital budget due to wasted money used in the Housing Transfer debacle. Not only have the Cabinet to make up the actual lost cash, they also have to contend with not receiving the receipts from the sale of the stock which they so confidently expected.

Whilst the Haslingfield warden Scheme is currently well-provided for, loss of grant is a disincentive to new schemes being formed. The District Council recently produced leaflets for distribution to encouraging new schemes - does the right hand know what the left hand is doing?

I have been involved in a range of volunteer activities and would like to encourage others to take up the volunteer role. It is rewarding, interesting and helps the community to function well. If anyone wants to explore volunteering informally, please phone me on 01223 870289”

Reduction in Housing Staff

More from the fallout of from the mismanaged Housing Transfer process which saw tenants and equity share residents voting to stay with the council. At the November South Cambs Council meeting, members voted not to give the Chief Executive and Leader a blank cheque to make staff redundant who deal with major repairs and improvements. This month, they return still with no figures attached (no lesson learned there, then) but after realising they were going to lose the vote, agreed a limit of £150,000 towards voluntary redundancies as a start. Two projects managers out of 6 will go. Redundancies agreed now may not happen until 2011.

Given that less budget is available in the future, and less work will therefore be done, the redundancies were inevitable. What is regrettable is that housing account and taxpayers’ money were wasted on a mismanaged process, when around £1.4m in total was needed for housing repairs and other general investment to benefit all residents of the district. It should be possible soon, as the municipal year ends to have a definitive figure of how much the Housing Transfer effort actually cost.

Icy Pavements

Bridget had a call on Christmas Eve about the dreadful state of the pavements in Avenells Way, Gamlingay which was preventing residents getting to the shops to buy their Christmas dinners. The County Council denied that it was their responsibility but the District Council did say that they would try to sort it out. She also talked to the Parish Council who we know are very concerned about this and they are purchasing some salt bins.

Shavings Direct in Great Gransden

We are very pleased that Huntingdon District Council are now making a concerted effort to resolve the problems experienced by residents resulting from both noise and smell from Shaving Direct. Do let Bridget know if problems persist or get worse.

Children’s Centre in Gamlingay

The County Council Children’s Centre is now running lots of activities for mums, babies and expectant mothers in the Crafty Cupcake in Church Street, Gamlingay. Do pop in to find out what is going on (and have a great cupcake while you are at it).

Road Safety, Lower Road, Croydon

We were so very sorry to learn of the fatal traffic accident on Lower Road, Croydon. Bridget has been talking to people working at Valley Court Offices, the Parish Council, police and fire service to see what can be done, if anything, to improve this accident black spot. There is an assessment of this road due out in a few weeks time on the relative safety of this road and once we have that we shall hopefully be able force the hand of the County Council to implement some long overdue safety measures. Sebastian presented a petition calling for safety to be improved on this road some years ago signed by many local people and nothing was done by the County Council. Hopefully this time it will act.

Young Place's Place Survey

Bridget has been undertaking some research with children and young people in Gamlingay to find out what they like about where they live and what they think could make it better. It was very gratifying to hear how much they appreciated their schools, the park and skate park and the professionals who worked with them. They also enjoyed living in a rural village where people were friendly and polite. The things they most wanted were

- Things to do e.g. more youth club nights
- Places to go e.g. areas where they would not annoy other people
- The means to get to places to do things, independently e.g. GOOD, AFFORDABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The last point was very important to young people of all ages and I shall be taking it forward in my role as member champion for children and young people. Thank you very much to the First School, Youth café and Youth Club for their help with this.

Flies

The fly problem in Gamlingay persists but we are doing our very best to sort it out. Rather alarmingly people at the other end of the village to Station Road have experienced problems. I am confident that South Cambs District Council Environmental Health team are working very hard on this but I would still like to hear from anyone else who is affected.

Gamlingay Records Haiti Benefit

Gamlingay Records is hoping to do a fund raising gig for the victims of the Haiti earthquake. Please contact Bridget who shall be helping out and would like to hear from anyone else who would like to be involved in anyway whatsoever.

Sheltered Housing

At present, our part of South Cambs is well served because we have two sorts of sheltered housing provided by either the Council or a housing association, plus private provision. The two sorts of public provision are straightforward rented or equity shared bungalows, with the provision of daytime staff and PCT-based out of hours emergency hours care. Secondly there is extra-care housing where individual tenanted / equity shared is provided with the addition of lunch each day, plus other facilities. This is provided at Bircham House, Sawston, and at Linton, just coming on stream, both schemes being owned by Hereward (Sanctuary) Housing, with financial / land assistance from S. Cambs.

At present, we have no extra care facility anywhere else. The cost of category 1 above is being subsidised heavily by the general needs tenants. Roughly £600,000 pa is involved, hence the need to restructure the service. As generally people are living longer, we feel that some of our ordinary sheltered housing needs to be reorganised into extra-care schemes – for example, in Cottenham, there are 3 sheltered schemes. One should become extra-care. Any views ?

Lorry parking in Church Street, Gamlingay

We are very aware that there is an ongoing problem caused by lorries parking on the pavement in order to make deliveries to the Co-op. I wrote to the Co-op about this almost 2 years ago and it did get better for quite some time. However, it is now a big problem again especially for people

pushing prams, and the elderly and disabled. This has been particularly apparent during the icy weather. Please do let us know what you feel about this issue.

Occupational Therapy Services.

Bridget sits on the Adult Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee and has been made aware of unacceptable waiting times for OT services in South Cambs. Admittedly if you are a top priority you get seen straight away however if you are a priority 2 or 3 you will wait between on average **28 weeks** for an appointment – that is half a year!!! Please let me know if you have been affected by these waiting lists.

Carbon Conversations

Gamlingay's Carbon Tsar and members of Gamlingay Environmental Action group have been taking part in 'Carbon Conversation' training and are now planning to run their own training. This will be open to all our villages and is aimed at making people more aware of their own carbon footprints and what they can do to reduce their environmental impact. For further details contact ccgamlingay@hotmail.com

Empty homes in South Cambs

Amazing to discover that even with 6,000 or so families on the South Cambs waiting list there are (as of October 08) 1,951 empty properties in the District! That's the size of a big village.

Meteorological Testing Mast in Arrington

You may have seen reports that a wind energy company has lodged an application for a testing mast 80m high in Arrington, on land to the left of the A1198. This application has now been withdrawn following quite reasonable concerns expressed by – among others – local Airfields and Marshalls of Cambridge but it does raise some questions about how South Cambs Parishes can contribute to the sustainability agenda. Have you any thoughts on this?

Police Matters

The Gamlingay Police Panel met in Haslingfield to review recent crime statistics and to listen to any concerns from local people as well as to hear a short presentation about the Police budget for the forthcoming year. What was clear was that crime (Anti-social behaviour) was down in Gamlingay following a quite intense period of policing although a recent spike in figures was reported to the meeting. So the priorities will be to tackle the spate of Bike thefts from sheds, particularly in Gamlingay, Criminal Damage in Orwell and Road safety issues.

The police will be tackling the road issues by issuing more tickets in problematic areas, conducting regular speed checks and staying on the look out for bad driving/parking when out on patrol. As for theft/criminal damage, they will increase patrols in areas where crime is taking place. The next panel meeting is on Wednesday 21st April 2010 between 19:30 - 21:00 at Gamlingay Village College – please come along – everyone is welcome.

Road Repairs

To report problems with the highway you can either ring 0345 0455212 or e mail street.scene@cambridgeshire.gov.uk. For problems with streetlights phone 0800 253529. The County Council has as I type 7 gangs out trying to repair some of the damage caused by the recent

bad weather. By the time you read this they should all be done – please let us know of any that are missed.

Waste Recycling

Following last month's report on the new wheelie bins we had some queries about the project. In response to a query about the actual freighters the response is that the council's contractor, Veolia Environmental, operates 11 kerbsider vehicles on the dry recycling service, of which five are owned by SCDC. Veolia will redeploy their vehicles onto other contracts. The SCDC vehicles will be returned to SCDC and sold. Income from the sale of these vehicles will be capital and as such has not been included within the published revenue costs.

The existing kerbside box will be replaced with a blue 240 litre wheeled bin and integrated 40 litre inner caddy. Whilst there will be an initial outlay in buying the additional wheeled bins and caddies, the indicative total net savings of the re-configured scheme could be in the region of £425,000 p.a. in year 3.

You will also be able to hand any used batteries on the wheelie bin in bags which will be collected at the same time – so that's a great step forward! If you have more paper that fits in the caddy the operatives will "probably" empty a green box should you continue to use one for paper only.

Local Transport Plan

Every home in the county will receive a leaflet outlining initial plans and giving each household the opportunity to give their views on local transport priorities by returning a questionnaire. PLEASE respond and in particular please highlight what you consider to be the problems with local transport – not enough buses, poor road maintenance or lousy winter gritting are some of the things you may want to mention. If nobody responds the County will set the priorities itself and YOU DON'T WANT THAT! You can respond online via a link from the main Local Transport Plan page at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ltp

On the subject of roads you will be annoyed to read that Cambridgeshire's Highways are degrading badly. On Principal Roads 3.4% need repair compared to 2.1% last year; on Non Principal Roads 7.1% need repair compared to 4.9% last year and on Unclassified roads 23% need repair compared to 19% last year (and there is no missing decimal point!)

More worrying still, the proportion of roads moving from "green" to "amber" (potentially needing repair) is allegedly very considerable indeed (20% estimated). This is a major problem for the future.

Are you or do you know someone long term unemployed?

237 temporary jobs for young people and the long-term unemployed will be created across Cambridgeshire thanks to £1.5 million received by organisations across the county. The jobs are aimed at 18-24 years olds who have been out of work and claiming Job Seekers' Allowance for at least nine months. The long-term unemployed aged 25 and over who are claiming Job Seeker's Allowance and live in areas where the unemployment rate is 1.5 per cent higher than the national average will also benefit from the new job opportunities. Those qualifying for the scheme will need to apply through Jobcentre Plus, with the first jobs available from February.

Alterations to our system of electing Councillors

At present, we have county elections once every four years, and a third of the District Council elected each May of the other 3 years. The South Cambs Cabinet is convinced that voters are fatigued by this process, which they feel accounts for poor voter turnout in some of their wards. However, when they pushed for another review of the matter (having been turned down by Council twice in recent years), they managed a resounding 10 votes in favour i.e. 8 of them and 2 others. Considering that there were **18** Conservative backbenchers present, it would seem that little internal consultation had taken place.

The question of whether we should opt for having one council for this area if alteration was thought necessary – i.e. a unitary authority , was raised during the debate by Liz Hezell. This was not welcomed by the Cabinet. It is suggested that the likely scenario for this area would be composed of South Cambs, Cambridge City and the area of East Cambs nearest to both. Do you think that the question of a unitary authority should be explored? Let Liz, Sebastian or Bridget know.