

Councillor Column – January 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

Elections

Discussions have been taking place at South Cambs about whether we should go to all out 4 year elections in the district instead of three years out of every 4 years (the fourth year is for County Council elections). We have opposed this – it will mean that you only get the chance to vote every 4 years which is arguably bad for keeping your councillors on their toes and working hard!

More Recycling!

Yes we are to have another wheelie bin to help increase our recycling levels.

South Cambs is going to change the household waste service. We will now have “a two stream co-mingled dry recycling service alongside the existing alternate weekly green and black-wheeled bins” as it is intended to replace the existing kerbside box recycling service with a blue 240lt wheeled bin and 40lt inner caddy (fitting inside the blue bin) collected on alternate weeks on the same day as the existing green bin.

The new service will collect paper (telephone directories; newspapers & magazines; general paper) within the inner caddy and mixed dry recyclables including cans and tins (steel and aluminium); aerosols; glass; plastic bottles; hard plastic (pots, tubs, and trays); cartons (tetra packs); cardboard; aluminium foil placed in the blue wheeled bin – and further materials to be added (i.e. plastic film) as processing facilities allow.

All marvelous, obviously (for those of us with space to have a third wheelie) – but how much will this cost in this time of austerity and massive cutbacks? The answer is £1,510,000 of which £500k comes from the County Council. As the cost of collecting your existing green boxes would outweigh their value, you are advised that you can either keep them or deliver them to specified collection points for onward recycling. Early days re timings and so on and it is likely that our collection days are likely to be changed as well but no doubt there will be a massive publicity campaign detailing this.

But why oh why didn't South Cambs go right to this system instead of introducing kerbside plastics collections? Lack of planning and thought, is why.

Flooding in the Cinques, Gamlingay.

Yet again the Cinques floods on what is already a very dangerous corner. We are fully aware of what a hazard this poses especially as it forces people to drive in the middle of the road on an already very narrow bit of road. Local residents are also concerned about flooding in their properties. We have asked for the gullies to be jetted immediately (this has been done) and for a

proper assessment of the drainage here. How sill that a patch in the road – requested urgently by us – was washed out literally 2 days later.

Cycle route from Gamlingay

We are delighted that after Bridget's initial contact, Sustrans are now working actively with the Gamlingay Environmental Action Group to develop a commutable cycle route between Gamlingay and Sandy Station via Potton. You may also be interested to know that there is talk about continuing the route into Cambridge. We'll keep you updated.

Future Olympian!

Congratulations to Harriet Brettle of Gamlingay who has been given a grant by South Cambs District Council to support her progress in the world of elite triathletes. Great as she swims, runs and cycles enormous distances at great speed!

Other Grants

Bridget is thrilled to report that Longstowe has achieved quite a sizeable grant for their new play equipment and playground and Croydon is getting funding for a disabled access to their church. If any village group would like a bit of help we are always very pleased to do what we can – Bridget is after all a professional fundraiser!!

Buses

Longstowe Parish Council has been very proactive in conducting a survey to find out when their community want buses to run and where they want them to go to. This was in response to the reduction in the 18 18A service. We have passed this information on to the County Council who are liaising with Stagecoach on our behalf and will keep you posted as to the outcome. Extraordinarily, Cambridgeshire County Council has been named as UK Bus Awards Transport Authority of the Year 2009. Perhaps next year we might invite the judges to come by bus only and see how the County fares then....

Police Matters

Sebastian and Bridget spent a very informative evening at the police control headquarters listening in to 999 calls and finding out how well our parishes are serviced. This visit was a response by the police to a number of complaints about crime and vandalism from residents of Mill St, Gamlingay. The police are happy to arrange another similar visit so please let us know if you would like to be included. This can include residents of the other villages in our parish. We guarantee a fascinating trip. From a resident's point of view the longest it would take for Police to arrive in Gamlingay if someone was trying to murder us was 15 minutes!

Little Gransden

Bridget has been making some enquiries on behalf of Little Gransden residents who are concerned about the fumes being emitted from Shavings Direct – which is located in Great Gransden. Please let us know if you have any similar concerns that you would like her to pass on.

Bridget was really pleased to be invited by Little Gransden Parish Council to show them the video Wake Up Freak Out. It has given them a lot to think about in relation to what even small parishes could be doing to reduce their communities CO2 emissions. If anyone would like a copy of the

video please do ask me or else it can be down loaded free of charge from the internet. She is happy to show the film to any other parishes who are interested.

Flies in Gamlingay

The problem of flies originating from the Station Rd Chicken Farm has not gone away despite the cooler weather. The owner is currently applying to expand the business. If you have any concerns about this please let us know.

Broadband in Hatley and elsewhere

Residents in Hatley have been experiencing problems with their internet connections for some time now. Residents across East Anglia are now being urged to register their demand for faster broadband through EREBUS (East Region Broadband Uplift Scheme). EEDA (East of England Development Agency) hope that this will encourage commercial suppliers to invest in 'next generation' broadband. If this is something that is of concern to you please google EREBUS to register your interest.

Public Rights of Way

As County Councillor I have received notices of proposals to change/amend/create rights of way in Wimpole, Hatley, Great Eversden, Orwell and Toft (which affects Comberton Village College pupils). Please contact me if you have any thoughts on any of these – they are available for your inspection on the website.

Post 16 Transport Allowances

Secondary students are reminded to check their entitlement to subsidised transport as they prepare for post-16 studies. Year 11 students - 15 and 16-year-olds - will now be completing their college applications for courses starting in September 2010. The County Council's transport policy allows post-16 students subsidised transport if they attend their nearest post-16 centre, and if it is more than 3 miles from their home address. If students opt to study at a more distant centre they will be responsible for all their transport arrangements and costs, so they will need to bear this in mind when making their applications.

View a copy of the current post-16 transport information booklet at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/education/transport and any queries can be e-mailed to post16.transportqueries@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

The Dreaded Guided Bus

I am too embarrassed to write anything over and above what you have already heard and seen in the media about the Guided Bus. Perhaps it will open one day.

Road Repairs

To report problems with the highway you can either ring 0345 0455212 or e mail streetscene@cambridgeshire.gov.uk. For problems with streetlights phone 0800 253529.

Housing, Money and South Cambs – What to do?

No apologies for including a fairly full report of a recent series of decisions about Housing and finances generally at South Cambs. What is clear is that the ruling administration is blindly walking off a cliff. Proposals were brought to a recent Council meeting which did not in the end even find favour with administration's own party! Effectively these fell into two parts – wholesale cutbacks to the tune of millions across all the Council services and widescale reform of the entire Housing part of the Council. And what a meeting! Suffice it to quote from another Councillor: “It had also been suggested to selected Parish Councils that they might like to attend this meeting. That was, in retrospect, perhaps a mistake. This was not our most glorious hour.” (If you were one of the Councillors who came along – sorry!)

Turning first to Housing, a recommendation to Council was that we should agree to put aside cash to fund the redundancies and early retirements brought about by the proposals to exposing the District Responsive Repairs Service to competitive tendering, the restructuring of the sheltered housing service from a site-based to a floating support model and the reduction in the grounds maintenance budget.

We obviously opposed the recommendation because not even a ballpark figure was available regarding likely costs, and after the huge expenditure (just under £1.4m) on the recent vote about privatising the housing stock, we were not inclined to vote for an open cheque; and any sensible citizen would not have either.

Next, we considered the Responsive Repair Service - this is the department that comes and mends things in our Council Housing. After a very thorough review, the staff have managed a huge improvement in the two thirds of the district served by S Cambs, the remaining third being out to contract satisfactorily to the Cambridge City Council repair service. The satisfaction rating for repairs runs at about 98%, which is extremely high, and which is possibly an indicator regarding reasons for the ‘no to transfer ‘ vote. Additionally the Council benefits to the tune of £236,000 “profit” from this side of the Housing function.

So instead of leaving well alone, the Administration have agreed to spend between £35k and £50k (they know not exactly) going out to tender. There is a distinct risk that not only will our staff suffer a significant loss of morale, but that a private firm desperate for business might get the contract, take on the SCDC staff and then go bust. This would leave the tenants and the Council in a desperate position. Needless to say both Councillors who serve on the repairs advisory board, one Conservative and one Liberal Democrat, had previously advised the Cabinet against going out to contract. Both these people have years of experience in this field. Unfortunately, we learnt during the Housing Futures debacle that the Administration is expert in not listening to advice.

Sheltered Housing Service

Another factor affecting housing finance is that the Government will not continue to fund support activities (Supporting People) at the current level. There are sheltered housing residents who do not want or need a daily visit, and there are others who do not wish to join communal activities. Some of the younger sheltered housing residents have gone to live on the schemes as an insurance for the future and not what they need now.

The Government says that the people who need the service must be those who pay for it, and Supporting People money is available to support those who need such help. On the face of it, this seems a reasonable proposition.

Under new Supporting People arrangements, all sheltered residents must be assessed as to their service needs. Hopefully, this could lead to an improvement in meeting need more appropriately.

Those who are assessed as requiring a daily visit will receive one. Some staff will be re-assigned to provide communal events. People do not like change, and the elderly particularly fear that they are going to be left in the lurch if an emergency comes upon them. It is very much up to us local councillors to take up any queries about assessment to ensure that the process is conducted fairly and thoroughly – so please contact us if you have concerns in this area.

Grounds Maintenance Budget

Cuts have been applied to this budget. Cutting grass for instance can be affected very easily by weather conditions, but it is fairly obvious that the appearance of closes and estates will probably not be as good as now. We are asking all our Parish Councils to consider taking on the work that South Cambs has decided it cannot any longer manage. This is certainly a further call on your tax – but a shabby looking part of a village leads to a cost for us all.

Village Warden Schemes

This affects older residents living in their own homes. We raised this in the debate about the Council's financial strategy. For some time, SCDC has given small grants to assist village warden schemes in recognition of the help given by paid staff and volunteers in several of our villages.

Councillors recently received a letter from the Cambridgeshire branch of Age Concern asking us not to vote to delete grants to village warden schemes in the future which currently amount to £20,000 p.a. When Cllr Liz Heazell started to talk about village warden schemes and cuts during the debate on the financial strategy, the Leader and his deputy interrupted to inform her that she should not be talking about sheltered housing during the financial debate and should leave it for the Housing item. It's not a great reflection on the Council that the Leader and his deputy did not know the difference between council sheltered housing and people living in their homes with help from village wardens!

Motion on services for the elderly

Cllrs Liz Heazell and Sebastian Kindersley proposed a review of all services to the elderly and the Administration have now agreed an all party review of Sheltered Housing in the Spring. As this will take place after the assessments of need have been done, we agreed to this compromise.

So over to you on this one. To make an effective contribution to a review we will need your input on all aspects of sheltered living. Please contact any of us to tell us what **you** think.

Haslingfield School

Congratulations to all at Haslingfield School who in a recent national Primary School League scored 31.3, second in the county and 119th (equal) in the UK. Haslingfield's added value score was 102.1, the highest in the county. Brilliant!