

My daughter posted a comment on Facebook at the beginning of September declaring that she had given in and switched the central heating on and I'm sure that many other people did the same. I felt very pleased with myself that I didn't; I just did what my mum and my grandma would have done: I put on an extra woolly. But as September closes none of us have need for anything other than the heat of the sun's rays. Glorious, isn't it? Soon, however, it will change again and we'll all need to give in and switch on the central heating or light the fire. With the high cost of energy it makes sense to do all we can to limit the amount we use and insulating our homes is one way to do this. There are grants available towards the cost of getting our homes insulated and there are local companies who will carry out the work. In a similar vein SCDC's application to install photovoltaics on the roof of its offices at Cambourne will come to planning committee this month. If the officer's recommendation of approval is endorsed these will not only provide free electricity during daylight hours [when it is most needed] but will also provide an income through the FiT over the next 25 years. There are two local groups, Sustainable Cottenham and Rampton Energy Group who were formed in response to SCDC's Sustainable Parish Energy Partnership initiative to promote issues like this to local residents. Further information is available about their efforts at their websites and I'm sure that both would welcome new members.

Talking about Facebook also reminds me of the meeting of full council this month. The suspension of standing orders to permit tweeting or blogging from the chamber has been accepted in recent past meetings but this time objections were raised and a vote of 26 for, 11 against and 6 abstentions did not provide the two thirds majority necessary. There are some strong views on both sides as you may have seen in the Cambridge News. I confess to having both Facebook and Twitter accounts. I am not the most diligent of communicators on either but I did Tweet the news about Cottenham Co-op. After an initial meeting with the Co-op at which I was joined by David Mudd as Cottenham PC Chair and Mike Smith, Cottenham Village Design Group Chair I tweeted the good news: that there would be improvements to the store and the bad news: that it wouldn't re-open till the new year. A few days later I was tweeting that the re-opening date would be early December. Amazing what effect a change of project manager had. There are risks for the Co-op in pursuing this but I am doing all that I can to see that the risks are minimised. This has taken up quite a lot of my time lately but I have found time to attend a few other meetings some of which are summarised below:

- 01/09: We had another meeting for residents of Smithy Fen. Officers from SCDC attended as well as members of the settled community but, despite the efforts of both officers and me to encourage some of the Traveller community to come, none did.
- 07/09: Planning Committee: No applications of local interest
Northstowe Parish Forum: This meeting was attended by representatives of all 3 parishes so I shall not duplicate their efforts in reporting back to their respective councils.
- 08/09: Members were offered the opportunity of a briefing on the options that are open to SCDC to fund the payment of £205million to the Government. These ranged from the impractical: self-financing through borrowing from other local authorities, the Public Works Loans Board or on the money market to issuing a bond through either public or private placement.
At their subsequent meeting Cabinet approved the appointment of a specialist financial advisor to investigate these options.
- 09/09: I joined the celebrations at Oakington Church of England Primary School for the official opening of their new classrooms.
- 14/09: Briefing on Affordable Rents: Since SCDC was stopped from building council houses, the responsibility for providing social housing has rested with a number of housing associations. They have been provided with grants from the government to allow them to do this. These grants are now being withdrawn and the government have a new plan to enable housing associations to keep on building. They will be encouraged to charge rents much closer to those of private rented properties and in so doing will be able to borrow against their projected income from these rents to fund new building. To date people in housing association and SCDC properties have been paying about 50% of commercial private rents. Under this new scheme new housing association tenants will be paying closer to 80%. The big problem is that this may well put rents for 3 and 4 bed properties above the housing benefit maximum so

Your councillors are here to help you. Please feel free to contact us with comments, questions, problems or complaints. We hope we can help but, if we can't, we probably know a [wo]man who can.

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- what is officially termed an 'affordable rent' by the government may in reality be an 'unaffordable rent'. There is concern that this will result in families not being able to make their rent payments and consequently becoming homeless.
- 15/09: Leader's PfH Meeting: The current grants schemes will be streamlined to provide a framework that is transparent and flexible and the Community Chest grant fund which had proved so popular previously will be restored.
- 21/09: Task & Finish Group meeting for Elected Member Development. The briefings mentioned previously are part of the commitment of SCDC to provide development for councillors. SCDC is now almost ready for assessment for Charter and it is understood that this will happen in January 2012.
- 22/09: Enforcement & Inspection Review. Who could resist going to a workshop entitled Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll? Enforcement officers carry out a very wide range of responsibilities and this review will look at how resources can be most effectively allocated to give the best service.
- Full Council Meeting: There was a notice of motion to recognise and express appreciation for the work of the DLO as they move to work for Mears. SCDC recently put the repairs service for its 6000 houses out to tender and sadly the contract was not awarded to our very successful in-house service. Concern has been voiced that, by going outside the organisation there is a potential loss of control both over the quality of service and its costs.
- 28/09: Briefing on the Cambridgeshire Renewables Infrastructure Framework. This work is designed to identify how the county can best meet some very challenging targets for the provision of energy through renewable sources.
- 29/09: I joined a good many councillors, parish, district and county, as well as a host of other community representatives and local residents to witness the official opening of CVC Academy's new 6th Form Building.

Other items of interest:

A couple of pieces of advice from the police for those not signed up to e-cops:

1. They are aware of a method which has been developed to block the signal from your key to your vehicle. It means that you may believe your vehicle to be locked when in fact it is not. This method has been used in car parks etc and can easily be avoided by either locking directly with the key or ensuring that you are close enough to see if the vehicle is locked or not.
2. You can register free at www.immobilise.com all your valuables so that police can check them against stolen property.

Dates for Diaries:

- 05/10: Planning Committee – please note new start time: 10.00
- 07/10: 09.30-16.30: Council Open Day at Cambourne with representatives from a wide range of services on hand to answer questions and offer advice.
- 11/10: 19.00 Neighbourhood Panel at Impington Village College.
- 13/10: Local Democracy Week Open Day at Cambourne
- 26/10: 17.30-19.00: Water, Water Everywhere: Cllr Mike Mason will be hosting a briefing on flood protection, drought and water management. Open to both district and parish councillors but places are limited. To book, email Claire.dillon@scambs.gov.uk or ring her on 01954 713026.

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