

With the recent warm temperatures it doesn't seem possible that it's December again and Christmas is round the corner. Is it really 5 months since Cottenham Co-op closed following the fire? That time must have passed very slowly for those who rely on it but I'm sure time is fleeting for the contractors as the last few days tick by till the date announced for its re-opening – this coming Thursday, 08 December 2012. I have finally let up on my daily visits to check on progress but they do seem to be on track to open in time for the Christmas period.

You may, like me, not be feeling very Christmassy yet but may I take this opportunity to wish you and yours a very Happy Christmas and New Year. And now, for the last time this year here's a summary of some of the meetings I attended in the last month:

01/11: Planning Committee – Site Visits

02/11: Planning Committee: Item of local interest: 315 High Street, Cottenham: Approved.

03/11: Scrutiny Committee: The item which attracted the greatest debate was Community Transport in South Cambridgeshire. The County Council PfH and Officer who attended were very closely questioned about the Cambridgeshire Future Transport Strategy and its impact on SCDC's Community Transport Strategy by members of the committee as well as the County Council's Opposition Spokesman for Transport. Whilst CCC seek to offer franchises to run schemes to augment the bus service once cuts in subsidies are made there is concern that no franchisees will come forward to run services which have previously not proved viable without those subsidies. The effectiveness of the current consultation questionnaire was also questioned.

08/11: Visit to Smithy Fen with Chris Bradley, SCDC EHO.

09/11: Smithy Fen Resident's Meeting

10/11: Cabinet: The draft Corporate Plan was presented to Cabinet prior to the launch of a public consultation exercise. Regret was expressed by many present that the action to install solar panels on the Council's housing stock had to be deleted as a result of the government's recent changes to the FiT timescale. This change makes the project financially unviable and the contractor, unable to complete the work in time, has withdrawn. The draft medium term financial strategy [MTFS] was presented and members were advised of the uncertainties underlying the forecast for the period to 2016/17. This is a period which will require skilful financial management and it is proposed to increase the minimum General Fund working balance to £2.5million. The time for payment of the £206million debt under the self-financing regime for the Housing Revenue Account comes ever closer. Whilst this is a huge burden it also offers opportunities for the future. The Council has also now produced a People and Organisational Development Strategy to support the MTFS and the aims and approaches of the Council.

11/11: Sustainability, Planning & Climate Change PfH Meeting: An update report on 'The Way Forward' an action plan which was drawn up following the Task & Finish Group's review of the service earlier this year was brought to the PfH for endorsement. There is no doubt that a great deal of hard work has been done to improve performance of the service but the real measure of this will be the feedback from users of the service. The full report is available on the website within the agenda pack for this meeting. There was also a report on the work of the Sustainable Parish Energy Partnership. There was a lot of support expressed for continued funding of the dedicated support officer post. The enthusiasm and energy of the current post-holder would be a great loss to member groups of the SPEP. A concerted 3 month insulation campaign is to run from January to March 2012 and SusCott will hold one of the first events on 14 January.

15/11: Environmental Services PfH Meeting: Further economies and efficiencies are being sought in the bin collection service. A review of the current structure of the rounds [in place since 2003] will be undertaken. As a member of the RECAP partnership, SCDC will use route optimisation software currently in use by fellow members, Cambridge City Council and Huntingdon District Council. For me the most notable aspect of this portfolio is the breadth of subjects that are covered: Refuse Services/Fly Tipping/Pest Control, Member Training & Development, Health & Wellbeing, Water Management [drains,ditches,etc.], Health & Safety and Food Safety. The PfH surely has her work cut out!

15/11: Northstowe & New Communities PfH Meeting: The Rampton Drift Project has seen 12 homes built in the 1960/1970's upgraded to improve their efficiency and reduce their carbon footprint.

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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.

Simon Edwards, [Cllr.edwards@scams.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.edwards@scams.gov.uk) 01223 233682/07711079089

Lynda Harford, [lyndaharford@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lyndaharford@yahoo.co.uk) 07889 131022

Tim Wotherspoon, [timwothers@aol.com](mailto:timwothers@aol.com) 01954 252108

Amazingly the work was done whilst the families were still living there. Minister of State, Greg Barker recently visited. The Exhibition Centre is also now open.

The PfH for Economic Development held his first meeting in tandem with the N&NC PfH. He agreed the draft service plan priorities for his portfolio for 2012/13.

- 16/11: More for Less: A very interesting briefing on Cloud Technology and the way its benefits are being investigated for use at SCDC.
- 16/11: Northstowe Parish Forum: All parishes were represented and will doubtless be updated by their own representatives.
- 17/11: Leader's PfH Meeting: Hip Hip Hooray: despite some reluctance on the part of the Leader, Cottenham Village College got its grant of £1,180 for the purchase of a portable exhibition hanging system. I am a firm supporter of the arts in the local area and I look forward to seeing this equipment being used extensively by the groups of talented artists in our own 3 villages as well as others across the District. Please remember that SCDC offer Community Facility, Village Sports Facility and Arts Capital Grants. There is a total amount of £240,000 still remaining £100,000; £100,000 and £40,000 respectively. There is also a small budget available for grants for Historic Buildings.
- 17/11: Finance Briefing: This highlighted Welfare Reform and the impact it will have on SCDC's Housing Portfolio as well as the opportunities that will be offered through the self-financing regime for the Housing Revenue Account. This is an extremely complex subject upon which members will be required to vote in the near future and the briefings that are offered on a regular basis by officers provide members with excellent preparation for this onerous responsibility.
- 21/11: Welcome relief from normal council work: demonstration of how talented some of our youth are. I spent a very enjoyable evening at Cottenham Sixth Form College.
- 23/11: Task & Finish Group: Member Development: Assessment for Charter Status on 14.01.2012.
- 24/11: Northstowe & New Communities PfH Meeting: The Northstowe Planning Performance Agreement was approved. A PPA is a framework agreed between the LPA and an applicant in the case of complex development proposals. It is seen that this type of project management encourages a more transparent and efficient process which benefits all parties. The draft can be read in full on the website as part of the agenda pack for this meeting.
- 24/11: Full Council Meeting: Members voted not to increase their allowances for a fourth year. The result was tweeted by Members and the Cambridge News reporter present.
- 25/11: Solar Energy Forum at Meldreth: A phenomenally well attended event at which the government's changes to the FiT were but one topic on which different opinions were aired.
- 26/11: Exhibition of local artists' work at Cottenham Sixth Form College. This ran for 3 days so I hope that many of you had the opportunity to visit and enjoy [and buy?].
- 29/11: Task & Finish Group – Enforcement & Inspection.

### Diary Dates:

07/12: Planning Committee: No items of local interest

10/12: Dickensian Christmas at Denny Abbey 12.00 – 16.30

18/01: Climate Change & The Sustainable Parish Energy Project: a workshop to be run by Richard Hales and Siobhan Mellon. Open to Members and Parish Councillors. Starts at 17.30.

Twinning Opportunity: St Paul Les Dax, situated in the Bordeaux Region of France is looking for a community in South Cambridgeshire with which to 'twin'. Contact: Heather Adams, 01954 713430, [heather.adams@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:heather.adams@scambs.gov.uk) by 09 December 2012

Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England. Full document available at [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/housing\\_strategy2011](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/housing_strategy2011) A questionnaire should be emailed out to parish councils by the end of January 2012.

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