

## **Monthly SCDC Report by Lynda Harford – March 2011**

I am approaching the first anniversary of my election to council and I look back on a year of huge learning. There have been so many people that I have met who have patiently supported this learning and I am very grateful to them all. I have always believed that local politics are very different to national politics and my experience through this last year has endorsed this belief. Colleague councillors like Tim Wotherspoon and Mike Mason as well as members of my own group, Sebastian Kindersley, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith and others have given me tremendous support and encouragement. I have had the pleasure of learning alongside another newcomer this year, Jose Hales and many have enjoyed a joke at our expense as we popped up at so many meetings side by side. My thanks to all of them and to the chairmen and members of the parish councils of the 3 villages that I represent; you, too, have added to my learning in so many ways. I very much look forward to taking my newly found and growing confidence in my role of representing every one of you into this next year. There is no doubt that this next year is going to be a hard one with the challenges that face the council of making a little go a long way. This month's portfolio holder meetings have all looked at, amongst other things, their service plans. There has been much emphasis on value for money. I am saddened that, when asked, SCDC's residents seem to be unaware of the value that is actually delivered by the council currently on one of the lowest council tax rates in the country. Obviously we have work to do to change that perception and I will continue my attendance at, amongst others, the Policy and Performance PfH meetings and report back to you as I have done during my first year. I hope that this will help you gain a greater understanding of the work of the council and give you the opportunity to question and make suggestions for improvement. This last month has seen agendas requiring a vast amount of pre-reading and preparation; the Environmental Services PfH meeting agenda pack consisted of 199 pages and the New Communities PfH resorted to issuing us all with a CD-ROM containing many of the supporting papers which would otherwise have resulted in many trees being chopped down. The mention of the chopping down of trees reminds me of the other very important part of my role: casework. I have been challenged to learn about so many things by the requests for help/support from parishioners: planning applications, housing, benefits, environmental health and, whilst acknowledging the support I have received, I must not omit to add the officers of SCDC to my list of willing teachers and thank them for their time and patience.

As usual I list below the meetings attended with some points of note. However, the full agendas and minutes are always published on the SCDC website and you may like to look at some of them in more detail.

**02 March: Planning Committee**

9 Station Road, Oakington – refused.

There were 2 applications for solar farms. Permission was given for the one at Chittering but the one at Bourn was refused.

**08 March: Planning PfH Meeting**

The PfH's decision to support the emerging Local Transport Plan 3 and to endorse the District Statement for inclusion within that plan was subsequently the subject of a call-in and minor amendments were made.

**08 March: New Communities PfH Meeting**

[i] The PfH agreed that a single South Cambridgeshire Development Plan should be prepared incorporating a review of the Core Strategy DPD, Site Specific Policies DPD and the Development Control Policies DPD into one document. The Gypsies & Travellers DPD will continue to be prepared as a separate document. A new Local Development Scheme will be prepared on this basis and will come to the PfH for signing off at a future date.

[ii] The PfH also agreed the methodology for the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment as a key part of the evidence base for the LDF review. He also agreed as part of this to the setting up of a Housing Market Partnership and the issuing of a 'call for sites'.

**10 March: Environmental Services PfH Meeting**

An interim performance report on the blue bin recycling scheme was presented to the PfH. There is no doubt that this has been a major success and is providing additional revenue as well as cost savings.

- 15 March: Policy & Performance PfH Meeting**  
 There is a review of the Contact Centre being undertaken in anticipation of the end of the current contract [December 2012] that SCDC has with County. The PfH was asked to approve amended service proposals from County. The most noticeable change will be Saturday opening which will now be from 09.00 to 13.00 [previously 08.00 to 20.00]. The number of calls received on Saturday afternoons is very low and the emergency help line will still be in operation. The changes will result in a saving for SCDC of £64,878 over the remainder of the contract period [equivalent to £38,927 pa]. There is also a Scrutiny Task & Finish group of which I am a member investigating the bigger picture of customer contact and how SCDC should be developing communication channels to meet the preferences and needs of the community.
- 15 March: Finance & Staffing PfH Meeting**  
 The PfH approved changes to the policy for the payment of discretionary housing benefits.
- 16 March: Planning Enforcement Sub-Committee**
- 30 March: Chairman's Arts Awards**  
 This was a wonderful evening with awards presented to many very talented individuals. Locally we should feel very proud of TyrannoChorus. This choir is an amalgamation of 3 separate choirs spanning different ages – from about 4 to.. well, as a lot of them are ladies, I couldn't possibly hazard a guess. All are managed by the same Cottenham couple who richly deserve their award and our praise.
- 31 March: Leader's PfH Meeting**
- 31 March: New Communities PfH Meeting**  
 This was a special meeting convened for the PfH to consider grant applications prior to the financial year end. Local interest: An award of £12,000 was agreed for Oakington & Westwick PC who had applied for £30,000 towards the new play area on the recreation ground.
- 31 March: Cabinet Meeting**  
 Cabinet agreed to the appointment of 2 additional officers for the Planning Policy team on temporary/fixed term contracts of 2 years. These are required to cover the volume of work which the preparation of the DPDs as discussed at the New Communities PfH Meeting of 08 March [see above] will entail. Cost will be met mainly through other savings with some money being taken from the reserve.

**Dates to note for April:**

- 06 April:** Official opening of the Cottenham Community Centre coffee shop
- 12 April:** Histon Neighbourhood Panel Meeting
- 13 April:** Northstowe Parish Forum Meeting
- 14 April:** SCDC Full Council Meeting
- 26 April:** Sustainable Cottenham Meeting

In closing this report I reflect on a very interesting first year in office and look forward to whatever year 2 may bring my way. The Localism Bill is going to describe a very different way of working and I welcome your suggestions for ways in which I may offer support to you to ensure that our communities are best served.

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