

District Councillor's Annual Report - Caldecote

April 2013

1. General

The municipal year 2012/13 has come to an end, and this one year that has been particularly difficult both at parish and district levels. I served as a member of the Planning Committee and was shadow opposition spokesperson for the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio. I am also a member of the Advisory Board of the Little Footsteps Childrens Centre.

At Parish level, I have worked with the Parish council on district related issues as planning, environmental health (drainage/flooding), and held councillor drop-in surgeries where residents could come and discuss any issues or problems that they had or needed assistance to help resolve.

I want to thank the Parish Council for their support this year and will continue to work together with the them to get the best outcomes possible for the village on all matters to do with SCDC (and more).

2. Planning

2.1 Policy

SCDC is currently undergoing a process to create a new Local Development Plan which will set out how land in South Cambridgeshire is to be developed from 2016 to 2031. Two public consultations took place, the first during the summer of 2012 and the second in January 2013. SCDC received over 20,000 responses in summer and 10,000 in January, showing a good engagement. The public exhibition that took place here in Caldecote at the pavilion was the most attended! Thank you to all those who have engaged so far.

The main issues for Caldecote were:

- a) Bourn Airfield Option 1 – potential development of 3000 houses
- b) Bourn Airfield Option 2 – alternative types of commercial/employment use
- c) Bourn Airfield Option 3 - community stadium (least preferred option)
- d) Caldecote playing fields – to be designated Protection Village Amenity
- e) Caldecote village framework – tidying up of the eastern boundary

Members have had two workshops to discuss the results. Officers are drawing up draft chapters for the new plans and some of these have been discussed and recommended to Cabinet for discussion. There will be further consultations later in summer as part of the plan process.

2.2 Development Control

There have been a couple of thorny planning issues in the village, namely:

- a) the Touring Caravan Park on Land Adjacent to Casa de Foseta,
- b) so called Plot 7 The Willows, - Appeal against refusal allowed with costs awarded against SCDC
- c) Land adj to 6 Main Street – approval for 7 houses including 3 affordable.
- d) 101A West Drive – long standing issue requiring close boarded fence to be moved back and reduced in height for visibility.

Touring caravan park: When the application went before the planning committee, I argued strongly against it (and voted against), but it was approved by the committee on the chairman's casting vote, despite what I thought were strong arguments against it. There was also the mix-up of which department would set the seasonal opening times, and as it transpired, Environmental Health could not set it unless it was a planning condition, and planning had said it could not set it because it was down to Env. Health.

There was no clear ownership of this vital function and I kept prodding the Planning Portfolio Holder and the administration for an answer. Finally, at the Full Council meeting in September 2012, in response to my tabled question, the Portfolio Holder admitted that SCDC did not have a policy for setting seasonal opening times for caravan parks!

I have tabled a request to include such a policy in the new local development plan to avoid any other community going through the same problem.

In the meantime the land owner has put in an application to build 4 bungalows. As the application is a departure from current planning policy, I have requested that it should be looked at by the planning committee. I will continue to work with the parish council to try and get the best outcome for this site.

3. Finance

The SCDC element of the council tax was frozen, but the county element went up by 1.9%. SCDC on the face of it has not reduced services, but the reality tells a different story. Fees have been increased for various functions such as planning, environmental health services (bins, pest control etc.) and capital grants have been cut. Staff in some areas are stretched which affects the quality of service they can give.

Unfortunately, the news does not get any better. Decisions taken early this year means that Council tax has gone up for all of us, as shown by the Band D figures in the table below.

	Parish Precept	County/District/Fire/Police Precept
Caldecote	£120.84	£1583.56
Kingston	£70.85	£1533.57
Toft	£71.43	£1534.15

The SCDC precept is £120.46, County is £1100.07, Police is £177.93 and Fire is £64.26

Welfare Reform: The welfare reform kicked in on 1st April 2013, and SCDC expects that over 3,000 residents in the district will be affected as three measures kick in namely (i) localised council tax where those of working age will see a reduction of about 8.5% in their council tax benefit (9 residents in Caldecote affected) (ii) the so called bedroom tax for under-occupation of social rented property where the housing benefit is reduced by 14% for one underused bedroom and 25% for two underused bedrooms (2 families in Caldecote) and finally (iii) the benefit cap limiting benefits received to £350 for single adults and £500 for couples (none in Caldecote).

SCDC has also changed the rules for council tax relief for properties. Anyone with an empty property will now pay 100% council tax for even one day. It is estimated that 72 homes in Caldecote will be affected by these changes.

Overall, not a good year for our pockets in South Cambridgeshire!

4. Economic Development

SCDC says that South Cambridgeshire is open for business!

1. Cambridge-Plus website

It has created a website at <http://www.cambridge-plus.com/> which aims to provide active support for businesses already in, or seeking to, settle in the South Cambridgeshire region. The council expects jobs to grow by 1200 per year over the next 15 years, and this forecast is driving the development plan.

2. Business support and service fund

The council also created a support service which ran for six months from October 2012 to March 2013. Exemplas ran the service on behalf of SCDC, and offered free business advice and guidance to eligible small and medium businesses, in the form of free workshops. These were aimed to provide knowledge and support needed to develop business skills they could apply for those wanting to start a new business or those looking to grow their existing businesses.

The Business Support Fund which provided grants of up to £1,000 was available to anyone that has been running a business within a South Cambridgeshire postcode for at least 12 months and/or could demonstrate that the recession was causing them difficulties.

The initiative was hailed as a success, as over 150 businesses participated. It is not known if it will be run in the future.

5. Housing

The Council now has full control of the rents it collects from its council houses, having bought itself out by paying £205 million to the government. This was paid for by taking out a loan from the Public Works Loan Board, to be paid back over 30 years.

Part of the plan is to use some of the Housing Revenues income to build new council homes and it has made a start by announcing plans to build some in Linton. This is a long term plan, and it is not expected to ramp up until a few years down the line.

It is also expected that the Council may now be able to take on the small number of affordable homes that come up on small developments (typically 1-3) which Registered Social Landlords usually do not want to take on.

There is a need for cheaper housing in the village, especially for key workers and those people with family links to the village as shown by SCDC records. I am working with the parish council in trying to ascertain the exact level of need for affordable homes in the village. The first steps have been taken, with a request to Cambridgeshire ACRE to carry out a survey. Further information will be provided as appropriate

6. Transport

Bus transport for our area changed and is still undergoing changes as Cambridgeshire County Council withdraws subsidies. The County has promised that the subsidies will continue until alternative solutions have been found for the affected routes. Stagecoach No 18 that goes through Kingston and Toft, and Whippet No 2 through Caldecote are affected.

SCDC is working in partnership with the County, and have come up with the Demand Responsive Transport idea. This scheme aims to provide transport on demand for all bus users, either in the form of a door-to-door service (e.g. doctors surgery) or to link up with fixed service commercial routes (e.g. No 4 on A428/ at Hardwick), or with transport hubs (e.g. Park & Ride). This is an opportunity to design a service that will suit most of the current bus users and encourage more people onto the buses. I am part of the working group that is working on this project.

I have arranged for information leaflets and questionnaires to be distributed to every household in the village. Please complete the questionnaires, even if you are not currently a bus user, and return the form either to SCDC directly, or better still drop them off at the Caldecote Village Shop and I will collect them. We need your help to design a local transport system that will work for you. Please feel free to contact me with any ideas that you may have about the potential new service.

7. SCDC Youth Council

The South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) Youth Council was formally launched on Wednesday 23rd January 2013. The Council received nominations from young people from across the district, and though 20 places were available, only 15 of them have been filled. The Youth Council will give young people in the district a chance to have a voice and to influence the decisions taken by the Council which will ultimately affect the development of their neighbourhoods.

There are no youth councillors from any of the villages in Caldecote Ward, but I hope that this will change in future.

SCDC is also encouraging local parish councils to engage with young people in their parishes in a similar way. Glad to see that a Youth Club is forming in Caldecote thanks to the sterling efforts of Cllr.S Barker and Gwen Tolhurst. I would urge parents and residents in general to support this work as best as they can.

8. SCDC New Look Website

The Council launched a “new look” website in January 2013, which was developed in response to the increasing number of residents wanting to carry out their transactions online at times convenient for them.

The new look website should make it easier for residents to Pay for it - Apply for it – Report it. It just means the site is easier to navigate, and users should be able to find what they need quickly/efficiently so they can pay bills, report problems and apply for services from the Council.

The Council can still be contacted by phone on 03450 450 500 and the website is still at www.scams.gov.uk

9. Broadband

Race To Infinity: Finally the Race to Infinity prize is within our grasp!! Residents of Caldecote are now able to order Infinity. This is an anti-climax following the long delay that we have endured since a small number of lines were released in the village back in September/October 2012.

There is still some way to go yet, but we hope that following the visit to Caldecote this month of Mrs Annette Thorpe the East of England Partnership Director who is tasked with rollint out Infinity for both Madingley and Caxton exchanges, the rollout will go smoother.

As part of the prize, BT donated a (50 inch) TV screen to the village and it will be used in the Pavilion.

Connecting Cambridgeshire Project:

Connecting Cambridgeshire signed a milestone contract with BT in March 2013 that means businesses and communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will have fibre broadband coverage by the end of 2015.

The targets are for more than 90% of homes and businesses to be able to get broadband speeds of 24 Mbps and higher, with a minimum of 2 Mbps to very nearly 100% of premises. Connecting Cambridgeshire is now working with BT Openreach on planning and surveys for the roll-out of the new broadband infrastructure, which will require a substantial re-design of the network across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

This large-scale project will involve upgrading over 100 telephone exchanges, including Comberton exchange which serves Old Caldecote, Kingston and Toft and installing many more new cabinets across the county. Once BT has completed the initial design it will be able to publicise the phased roll-out, which is due to begin before the end of 2013.

Although active campaigning has now closed, residents can still register their details to keep up to date with the programme or view Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk

10. Other Local Issues

Banner Homes proposal for 18 – 28 Highfields Road – This matter rumbles on quietly, and the developers have held pre-application discussions with SCDC planning. Further talks have been arranged to take place with the parish council in May to discuss and see if there's a way forward for the use of the land. I will continue to work together with the Parish Council on this matter.

Caldecote Pumping Station: It has been an eventful year with the pumping station overflowing several times, tankers trundling through the village to empty it, sometimes keeping residents awake at night. The main problem is infiltration of surface water, which then overwhelms the pumps.

Earlier in 2012, when I insisted through SCDC to Anglian Water that the station was “not fit for purpose”, I received a more truthful answer that one pump was not working optimally. It was subsequently repaired and conflicting information provided since then says it has been replaced. I still maintain that it is not fit for purpose.

There is a new manager looking after this area, and I hope to meet with him soon, together with the Parish Council, to map out a way forward for our overworked pumping station.

In the meantime, please do not put down the toilet stuff like baby wipes and hard tissues etc, as this is what causes the pumps to clog up and stop working!

During the year, I and the parish council discovered that the Hardwick pumping station on St Neots Road also serves some the residents of Caldecote living on St Neots Road. That station also had problems with overflowing, which have now been resolved due entirely to the efforts of some of the residents concerned.

11. End of an era

Fiona Whelan is not standing for re-election as county councillor in May 2013 for family reasons. I have enjoyed working with her immensely and needless to say will miss her sorely.

On behalf of all of us, I wish to thank Fiona for her hard work and dedication, and to wish her well for the future.

She is not going far

12. Councillor Drop-in surgery

I have been holding drop-in surgeries on the first Thursday of each month, at the village Hall from 7pm to 8pm, so that residents can come and have a chat with me about any issues they wish to raise or is bothering them or want me to help them with at SCDC.

Thank you to those who have dropped and I hope to see many more people over the coming year.

Please feel free to bookmark my website <http://www.tumihawkins.org.uk> so that you can read in more detail about some of the issues that I've reported on here, and of course for information in the coming months.

My contact details are as shown below.

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