

District Councillor's Annual Report - Caldecote

May 2013

1. General

The municipal year 2012/13 has come to an end, and this one year that has been particularly challenging at the district level. 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 in Caldecote.

At Parish level, I have worked closely with the Parish council on district related issues (e.g planning, finance-grants, Demand Responsive Transport etc.), 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 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. I wish to thank all those who have engaged with the process so far, and hope you continue to engage until the plans are finalised.

The main issues for the Ward villages are:

- a) Bourn Airfield Option 1 – the proposal to build 3500 houses
- b) Bourn Airfield Option 2 – alternative types of commercial/employment use
- c) Bourn Airfield Option 3 - community stadium (least preferred option)
- d) Open Spaces – to be designated Protection Village Amenity or Local Green Spaces
- e) Bennell Farm, Comberton (in Toft parish) – proposal to build up to 90 houses

Elected Members have now had four workshops to discuss various aspects of the draft plan. We now know that South Cambs have included Bourn Airfield Option 1 in the plan, and that it expects that 1500 of those houses will be built by 2031. When built out fully, it will be the size of the present Cambourne! This will present challenges to Caldecote whose boundary will adjoin the new settlement. I envisage there will be lots of negotiating to do over the coming weeks and months to keep the smaller village from being gobbled up by the proposed new one.

2.2 Development Control

There seems to have been a lot of planning applications for the village this year. I like to think that it is a sign of growth in the village. There is one controversial application that was referred to planning committee and has now gone to appeal. It is in a sensitive location which may change a prominent view/outlook in the village. I submitted my comments as the Local Member to the appeal inspectorate and we await the outcome.

There has been a lot more planning issues in the other two villages, particularly in Caldecote, so I am glad that Kingston is not too busy in that sense.

3. Finance

3.1 Council Tax: 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 (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 and finally (iii) the benefit cap limiting benefits received to £350 for single adults and £500 for couples.

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

3.2 Grants & Funding: Much to the dismay of a lot of residents and those affected, the administration took the decision to remove all Arts funding with effect from this municipal year. The colleges, particularly Comberton Village College are affected, as they receive some funding which goes to part pay for Arts directors. They have some grace period in which to find alternative funding sources.

Capital grants have also been slashed with the removal of £300,000 from the funding pot. I am glad that all three villages were able to benefit from the capital fund before this decision was taken. I am happy to have been able to assist both Kingston and Toft in their successful applications for the village hall improvements.

The council has said it will still continue to fund the Grantfinder service which can be used to source funding from other grant providing organisations.

The Leader recently announced that he would no longer take requests for community chest grants for use in publishing parish plans without providing any alternative solution. This was a bolt out of the blue, and has meant that the request by Toft was denied at the last minute. I have a tabled a question on this matter to full council taking place later in the month.

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 also provided grants of up to £1,000 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 our villages, especially for key workers and those people with family links to the village as shown by SCDC records. I will continue to work with the parish councils to get provision for our villages. There are ongoing discussions with the owners of Bennell Farm in Comberton (Toft Parish) about their proposal to the Local Development Plan process. If that piece of land is accepted for development, SCDC has agreed to allocate the affordable housing element in a cascade scheme, which means the houses will be offered first to local people, and then cascade out to the rest of the area.

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 on 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.

The DRT information leaflets and questionnaires have been distributed to households in the villages. I would encourage those who have not yet done so to please complete the questionnaires, even if you are not currently a bus user, and return the form to SCDC. If you would like a copy, then please let me know. 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. Broadband

Connecting Cambridgeshire Project:

Connecting Cambridgeshire signed a contract with BT in March 2013 to provide communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with superfast 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

8. 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.

9. 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.scambs.gov.uk

10. Other Local Issues

Kingston seems to be the most quiet of the villages in the Ward. Having said that, you do know how to have a good time and I just want to say thank you for the invitation to participate in your local events. I really enjoyed the Jubilee party, the evening with Kingston Blues Band and the Christmas carol service.

11. Councillor Drop-in surgery

I have been holding drop-in surgeries on the second Thursday of every other month, at the village Hall from 7pm to 8pm. Residents can come and have a chat with me about any issues of concern or that they need me to help them navigate through the council. Thank you to those who have dropped and I hope to see many more people over the coming year.

The next surgeries will be on 11th July 2013 and 12th September 2013. But you don't have to wait till then to get in touch with me if you need my assistance.

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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