

District Councillor's Annual Report – Caldecote Ward

May 2014

1. General

Firstly, I wish to thank everyone who went out to vote at the elections held on 22nd May 2014, and in particular those who voted for me. I am glad to have been re-elected as your District Councillor with quite a substantial margin too. I will continue to work all year round taking up your concerns and helping you and your family to continue to enjoy living in our Ward.

As in the previous municipal year, I served as a member of the South Cambridgeshire District Council Planning Committee, was opposition spokesperson for the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio and a member of the Advisory Board of the Little Footsteps Childrens Centre in Caldecote. A later role is as one of the Members Advisory Group for South Cambs Ltd.

At Parish level, I have worked with the Parish councils 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 have also assisted local groups in their application for funding for a number of local projects.

I want to thank all three Parish Councils for their support. I will continue to work together with them to get the best outcomes possible for all our villages on all matters to do with SCDC.

2. Planning

2.1 Draft Local Development Plan (LDP)

This time last year, the process to create a new Local Development Plan for the period 2016 to 2031 was in full flow. This issue has been the most prominent for a lot of residents in the past year, due to the inclusion of proposal to build 3,500 houses plus other facilities on Bourn Airfield, now known as BAD (Bourn Airfield Development). The opposition to this proposal has been encapsulated in the StopBAD campaign, chaired by the very able Mr Des O'Brien, a resident of Bourn, supported by a team of people across the affected villages. I have supported the StopBAD campaign in my own right as a resident of Caldecote, as well as in my capacity as your District Councillor.

The main issues for the opposition to BAD are well known. In my view, the capacity claims by SCDC are suspect, because calculations show that BAD will need to be built out at capacity of more than 50 dwellings per hectare, which is double the newer developments capacity in Caldecote. The risk of coalescence of Caldecote and BAD is extremely high as is the creation of a ribbon of development from Caxton Gibbet to Hardwick-a distance of over 3 miles. The lack of plans for improving the road infrastructure, in particular A428/A1303 Madingley Rise and lack of jobs provision in this area means the development will not be sustainable and cause more traffic chaos. Drainage and flooding in Bourn Valley is also a major concern.

The draft LDP includes proposals to build up to 90 houses on Bennell Farm. My view is that it should be reduced to 60 houses. I am glad to have been able to work with former Cllr Harangozo of Comberton to negotiate and agree with SCDC that the affordable housing element of the site should be for only those people with a need in Toft and Comberton, or with close links to both communities.

The draft LDP was put to the vote at Full Council on 13th March 2014, for councillors to decide if it is acceptable and should go forward to the Planning Inspector for examination. It was voted through by 26 votes for, 21 against and 5 abstentions. The vote was carried by the majority Conservative Group. I voted against it, representing the majority of the views that residents of the Ward had expressed.

The draft LDP was submitted to the Planning Inspector on 28th March 2014, and the public examination is set to start in October 2014. That is the next and final stage when opposition to the proposed plans can be expressed.

2.2 Transport Strategy for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire (TSCSC)

Cambridgeshire County Council consulted on their proposed plans for transport in the sub region at the same time as the LDP. The emphasis of the plan is to change people's mindset in what it calls a "modal shift" by

forcing them to use public transport". The TSCSC was used by SCDC to support the draft LDF even though there are significant flaws in it.

The proposal includes their solution for the Madingley Rise traffic problem – putting a dedicated bus lane down the road from the roundabout at the top (near Madingley Mulch, to the junction with the M11. It is evident to all but the County that there is no space to do this.

It is also worth noting that the TSCSC does not have the same statutory authority as the draft LDP and in fact the TSCSC can be scrapped or not implemented by the County, should it chose not to do so. This also puts in serious doubt the viability of the draft LDP which depends heavily on the TSCSC.

I submitted a response to the TSCSC Consultation in which I pointed out the flaws of the proposal. The response to the consultation was very low, 700 only, but County officials in their report to the Cabinet insist that it gave the mandate to focus the plan on the modal shift, non-car use strategy. Watch this space.

2.3 Development Control

There have been other planning issues which deserve a mention:

- a) Touring Caravan Park on Land Adjacent to Casa de Foseta, Caldecote – this site now has planning permission for residential development. This was achieved only after concerted effort and working together with the parish council, landowner, SCDC planning to come up with a proposal that benefited Caldecote. This was subsequently approved by the planning committee-with a narrow majority in favour.
- b) 101A West Drive, Caldecote – landowner built foundations in the wrong place and did not fulfil pre-commencement conditions to submit proposals for dealing with the longstanding issue of the close boarded fence. A new application has been submitted, but without any proposal for the fence. This should go to planning committee for determination again.
- c) TKA Tallent, Bourn Airfield – TKA have been granted permission to knock down and build a new building. The opposition to this was only removed following agreement of strict conditions with the building owners to avoid the repeat of the noise nuisance problems that was caused when it previously operated on the site.
- d) Old Horse Yard, Toft – planning has finally been granted for the conversion to residential after nearly two years of trying and a lot of prodding and navigating the usual red tape.
- e) Summerhill, Kingston – The approval for building two houses on this prominent site was granted after much debate by the planning committee.
- f) North Farm House, Kingston – Another land mark site in the village, which got approval at planning committee following much debate, both at parish council and district level.

3. Finance

The Central Government grant for 2014/15 is £5 million, down from £5.8mil the previous year. The funding in 2010/11 was £7.823 and it is expected that the reduction will continue for the foreseeable future. The council is now shifting its focus on trying to get generate income to enable it provide the council services.

3.1 Council Tax

The SCDC element of the council tax has increased by 1.99% for this municipal year 2014/15, translating to a relatively small increase in payments for everyone, **£122.86 for a Band D** property, an increase of £2.40 on the previous year.

The council tax figures are:

	Parish Precept	County/District/Fire/Police Precept
Caldecote	£105.50	£1595.91
Kingston	£72.55	£1562.96
Toft	£74.75	£1565.16

The SCDC precept is £122.86, County is £1121.94 (increase of £21.87), Police including Crime Commissioner is £181.35 (an increase of £3.42) and Fire is £62.26 (unchanged). This gives a typical Band D increase of £27.69. It is worth noting that the Caldecote Parish precept has reduced by £15.34.

3.2 Business Rates

As of April this year the District Council has been able to retain the business rates, previously paid to government, that it has collected though some has to be paid out to the County Council, police etc.

This good news is tempered by the fact that businesses can appeal their ratings and if upheld, SCDC has to pay this back-and is liable to pay back appeals upheld during the past 10 years. There are a lot more appeals than SCDC anticipated, and this reduces the income that the council hoped to have generated. At least it is getting to keep more of what it collects.

3.3 Grants to Local Groups

SCDC has scrapped the capital grants pot that it used to give to local groups. This was done in a bid to save more money. No new funding will be approved, but previously approved grants will be honoured. The Community Chest grant (for sums of up to £1,000) is still available for smaller projects.

3.4 Other Expenditure

Whilst making swinging cuts to grants budgets and other budgets in the council, the administration went ahead to spend £45,000 on new tables and chairs for the council chamber, stating that it could then rent out the space to recoup the outlay. So far, the Council has not been able to show any income generated from renting out the council chamber.

4. Economic Development

SCDC continues to say that South Cambridgeshire is open for business, and that it will continue to support local businesses and assist businesses to move to the area.

4.1 Cambridge Plus website

The website at <http://www.cambridge-plus.com/> aims to provide active support for businesses already in, or seeking to, settle in the South Cambridgeshire region. The draft local plan is predicting 14,000 jobs will be created in the District between 2016 and 2031, but we shall have to watch this space.

4.2 Business Workshops

The council is running the Business Support Service again, through Exemplas. This is in the form of half day workshops to help those running or thinking of starting a business in the district and cover subjects focusing on the specific needs of local businesses, including business planning, recruitment and websites and social media.

Each workshop costs £10 +VAT, and anyone interested in attending can reserve a place by telephone 0844 346 0755 (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.30pm) and pay by credit or debit card. Full details can be found by visiting www.exemplas.com/southcamb

5. Housing

5.1 Social Housing Rent

The Council has increased social housing rent in line government guidelines which were set to protect tenants from unacceptable annual increases. The government has asked councils to limit their increases to no more than £2.00 per week in addition to an inflationary increase. For the financial year starting April 2014, the inflationary figure for SCDC was set at 3.7%, so the Council's rent increases are based on this formula of 3.7% *plus* a maximum £2.00 per week.

5.2 SCDC Ltd

SCDC has set up a property company with the objective of generating income for the council. The company, SCDC Ltd will buy properties on the open market and then rent them to the private sector at market rates. The original remit has been extended to include renting to those on the housing waiting list, and offering management services for organisations with large property portfolios. It may also build houses to rent on land that it currently owns that is suitable for development.

The pilot scheme started in February and will run for 6 months, monitored by a Member Advisory Group of which I am a member. SCDC will borrow £7million from the Public Works Loan Board at a favourable rate, and lend to SCDC Ltd at market rate, the difference being the income generated for SCDC.

6. Environmental Services

The green bin collections are being reduced from fortnightly to once a month during the three months of winter in a bid to save money. Collections will revert to fortnightly services when winter is over.

The Pest Control service has been scrapped as part of cost cutting exercise.

7. Transport

7.1 Bus Services

The Stagecoach No 18 service that goes through Kingston and Toft and previously scheduled to be scrapped due to subsidy withdrawal has been saved. I and representatives from Toft and Kingston worked with the Cambridgeshire Futures Transport (CFT) project to bring about the restoration.

I am carrying on with working with the CFT project to keep or provide better alternative for the Whippet No.2 service that serves Caldecote.

7.2 Demand Responsive Transport

This is an SCDC taken up by Cambridgeshire County Council and now adopted as a solution for providing additional bus services in the district.

It is planned to run fixed services during rush hour periods in the morning and evening, and a demand responsive service during the rest of the day. A Demand Responsive Zone (DRZ) has been set, which at this stage does not include Caldecote Ward because of the revised No.18 service, even though this bus does not serve Caldecote. I continue to put pressure on the County to provide a “fit-for-purpose” bus service and extend the DRT service to Caldecote.

7.3 A14 Highways Improvement Scheme

The good news as you know is that the A14 improvement scheme has been given the go ahead by central government. The bad news is that the A14 Girton interchange, which is being improved for A14 West and M11 south access, will not have the A428 West to M11 South movement that is so necessary to alleviate the problem of traffic jams on Madingley Rise.

At every opportunity, I have raised this issue with the Highways Agency. I discovered that the County Council at the time under control of the Conservatives, specifically instructed the Highways Agency not to do anything about it. County officials of course deny this, but Highways confirmed it.

The Highways Agency have, at my request, subsequently produced a potential change to the interchange, which looks a bit like spaghetti junction, and which they say will be too expensive to implement. I did speculate to them that perhaps the point of the convoluted design was to prove that it would be expensive to implement?

8. Broadband

8.1 Race To Infinity-Caldecote

The network infrastructure for providing superfast fibre optic broadband to Highfields Caldecote and Childerley was completed late 2013. This means that all premises in these communities can now order superfast broadband. In practice there are some problems for specific properties, and I established a procedure with BT Openreach whereby these issues are resolved.

BT has however rationed the capacity available to Caldecote but it is now in the process of making more capacity available to satisfy the pent up demand.

8.2 Connecting Cambridgeshire Project – Old Caldecote, Toft and Kingston

Connecting Cambridgeshire Project is making progress. Work on upgrading the Comberton exchange which serves Old Caldecote, Kingston and Toft is progressing well. One new cabinet has been installed in Toft, and another is to be installed opposite The Green. It is expected that this work will be completed by September 2014 after which the service should become available to order.

More information can be found at www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk/myarea

9. SCDC Administration Issues

SCDC has now amended its Standing Orders to allow members of the public to film its public meetings. This was to follow recent government guidelines designed to encourage the public to get more engaged with how local councils are run.

SCDC refused suggestions that the Council records its own meetings, on the grounds of cost, but allows members of the public to record those meetings in any format (film, audio, tweets etc.) as long as it is not disruptive to the meeting.

I continue to try to hold the SCDC administration to account by asking questions at Full Council meetings on issues affecting our communities. I submitted 5 questions and one motion:

- May 2013 on refusal to grant funding for Toft Parish Plan,
- July 2013 on what SCDC was doing to get the County to restart the Cambridgeshire Futures Transport Project
- September 2013 on the wording of the SCDC marketing information for the LDP consultation (gave the impression it was a done deal thereby putting people off responding)
- January 2014 on statements made by council officers and portfolio holders indicating the council will only consider minor amendments to the LDP indicating BAD was a done deal
- February 2014 on statements made by City and county councillors at a joint meeting that South Cambs was taking housing needs of The City
- April 2014 submitted a motion to consider returning to committee system of governance to give the majority of councillors the opportunity to actively participate in proper decision making rather than rubber stamping cabinet decisions taken by 8 out of 57 councillors. Motion was unsurprisingly defeated.

Members of the public can also ask questions at Full Council meetings, but this must be submitted according to guidelines and at least 10 days prior to the meeting.

10. Councillor Drop-in surgery/Case Work

I have been holding and will continue to hold drop-in surgeries on the first Monday of each month at Toft People's Hall from 6pm to 7pm, and on the first Thursday of each month, at the Caldecote Village Hall from 7pm to 8pm. This is 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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