

## South Cambridgeshire District Council Report May 2017

I had waited nineteen years to be able to say the words “Welcome to Northstowe” to the first residents, at an opening ceremony on 11 May. The sample of two was admittedly too small to be statistically significant, but several things stood out: (1) they were both EU citizens; (2) one worked in software and the other in pharmaceutical development – you couldn’t have made up two more perfect archetypes of the kind of young researchers driving the Cambridge economy, for whom we desperately need to provide housing that they can afford; (3) both were employed at science parks around Cambridge – to which, they said, they are perfectly connected because they take the A14 in the counter-tidal direction each morning and evening; (4) best of all, when I asked why they had chosen to come to Northstowe, one said “It’s simple. The mortgage I am paying on my own home here is that same as the rent I was paying for someone else’s house in Cambridge.” That’s the whole idea.

There are not many satisfactions from being a councillor, but occasionally we succeed in helping someone get something done, and all the frustrations and criticisms evaporate, at least for a fleeting moment. One such is the case of a disabled man with a disabled relative, who has been attempting for fifteen years to get permission for a specially adapted home for the two of them. I got involved two or three years ago when I became Right to Build champion. They finally got the go-ahead a couple of weeks ago.

A Supreme Court judgment <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2016-0076-judgment.pdf> issued on 10 May sought to clarify the relationship between “out-of-date” local plans and the NPPF. Two paragraphs by Lord Gill stand out:

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If a planning authority that was in default of the requirement of a five-years supply were to continue to apply its environmental and amenity policies with full rigour, the objective of the [National Planning Policy] Framework could be frustrated. The purpose of paragraph 49 is to indicate a way in which the lack of a five-years supply of sites can be put right [that is to say by triggering the operation of paragraph 14, the tilted balance in favour of granting permission unless the adverse effects of doing so significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposed development].

These requirements, and the insistence on the provision of “deliverable” sites sufficient to provide the five years’ worth of housing, reflect the futility of authorities’ relying in development plans on the allocation of sites that have no realistic prospect of being developed within the five-year period.

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May is generally a quiet month for meetings as councils shake down after local elections. No changes resulted from one byelection at the district council, but one matter of local interest at the annual meeting was a change of Planning Committee chairman. Pippa Corney (one of the members for the Willingham and Over ward) was reappointed to that post. David Bard is now vice-chairman. I was asked a question about the Green Belt, and I thought I would share my answer.

Also, Sue Ellington, her term of office as chairman concluded, has been brought back on to the cabinet to lead on health and wellbeing. She has led a widely praised task and finish group on social isolation, which is as bad for you as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. It is a particular problem in sparsely-populated rural areas and affects teenagers just as much as single seniors. Indeed, whole-life outcomes

for younger people can be irreparably damaged by incomplete interaction, especially with their peers. And of course, everyone has heard of the “new town blues”, a phenomenon inextricably linked with the fracturing of bonds and the severing of ties that come with being a pioneer in a new community. We are often unaware how dependent we are on a variety of support groups, most of them informal. The outcome of this work may be a set of toolkits for parish councils, according to the size of their villages, and for individuals a pack of cards covering a wide range of activities, each card giving brief details of who to contact, how to get started, where to go, when to meet, and why you might enjoy it.

The General Election campaign witnessed a false start on a social care financing mechanism, but it did at least raise the profile (if that were necessary) of how we are all going to pay for our care as we live longer, possibly experiencing more extended periods of infirmity than previous generations. A Dutch approach, known as the Buurtzorg model, ten years old this year, has taken the Netherlands by storm, and is about to be trialled in Cambridgeshire. We are exploring the possibilities for a pilot test-and-learn in South Cambridgeshire too. <https://www.buurtzorg.com/about-us/buurtzorgmodel/>

The Combined Authority met for the first time under its new chairman on 31 May, beginning with James Palmer signing the declaration of acceptance of office as Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. (My suggestion of giving a nod to Thomas Hardy by shortening the title to The Mayor of Peterbridge has not been taken up.) The constituent councils have appointed their members on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee, both of which are politically proportional. Furthermore, the chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must not belong to the same political party as that of the Mayor. There must be at least one independent person (in other words, not a councillor) of the Audit and Governance Committee. Indeed, the Combined Authority Board has appointed the independent person to be that committee’s chairman.

The Combined Authority portfolios have been assigned among council leaders as follows:

Deputy Mayor (statutory – productivity and trade) Robin Howe Huntingdonshire  
Deputy Mayor (constitutional – economic development) John Holdich Peterborough  
Fiscal Steve Count Cambridgeshire County Council  
New Homes and Communities Peter Topping South Cambridgeshire  
Transport and Infrastructure Charles Roberts East Cambridgeshire  
Employment and Skills John Clark Fenland  
Strategic Planning Lewis Herbert Cambridge City

The cyber attack on the NHS and the British Airways flight disruptions are yet two more examples of the vulnerability to which we have exposed ourselves in becoming ever more dependent on computer connectedness. I have regularly passed on alerts about cyber-security (on which Cambridgeshire Constabulary is one of the leading forces in the country). Individuals should follow the wealth of advice available on <https://www.getsafeonline.org/> Those seeking reassurance at enterprise level can go to <http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/small-businesses-know-your-business> And for corporate bodies, the National Cyber Security Centre is part of GCHQ: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/>

With the terrorism threat level toggling between severe (an attack is highly likely) and critical (an attack is expected imminently), it’s perhaps salutary to note that top place on the National Risk Register remains pandemic influenza, along with coastal flooding, widespread electricity failure, major terrorist incidents, acute air pollution, and antimicrobial resistance. Local authorities have emergency planning

teams trained to respond and tackle these. One of the reasons pandemic influenza is potentially so serious is that it would knock out a significant number of the care workers who normally treat illness.

Cambridge North Station opened on 21 May, and naturally I just had to be one of the first passengers to step on to the brand new platforms. Railway stations are often a bit dirty and dusty, so sparkling glass and polished stainless steel, together with a strong smell of fresh paint, made it a refreshing experience. Great connections with the Busway, including the cycletrack alongside.

The Bus Services Act 2017 received Royal Assent on 27 April. It was essentially an enabling bill, extending the ability of local transport authorities to introduce franchising or a new enhanced partnership arrangement. It also makes amendments to Quality Partnership provisions and aims to make it easier to introduce multi-operator ticketing and improvements to enhance passenger accessibility and information. Some provisions are specifically addressed to empower combined authorities with directly elected mayors.

The notion of “partnership” in this context is some sort of agreement between bus companies and councils, covering such things as lower-emission vehicles, punctuality, reliability (especially that the last bus will run), cleanliness, and so on, in return for which the council will undertake to instigate measures such as bus priority lanes and so on.

The bus industry was de-regulated in 1986, and there has been controversy ever since as to whether competition has had any beneficial effect on the quality of service. The rest of the country is always unfavourably compared to London. However, Transport for London is both a passenger transport authority and a highway authority, so its ability to deliver on free-flowing (or at least freer) bus lanes is much greater than elsewhere. And in London, all the buses may be branded bright red, but a system of franchises operates, whereby commercial companies bid for a (generally geographical) segment of the market. They then get exclusive rights to run buses on those routes.

The main concerns arising from promises attached to the latest attempt to improve the bus market seem to be that the bar to implement franchising in the rest of the country may still be too high and that the Competition and Markets Authority may be able to quash, water-down or delay franchising. One thing I have learned out of all this is that on average every bus passenger mile is subsidised one way or another to the tune of about 50p.

On Thursday 4 May I took a little time out from polling day to attend a talk at the Museum of Cambridge about “Rick’s Radical Mugs”. Rick Leggatt, a former Cambridge City Councillor, had amassed a collection of over five hundred mugs bearing campaign slogans. So there were examples from Greenham Common, the Miners’ Strike, anti-apartheid, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Wapping, the poll tax and so on; a real throwback to the nineteen eighties and nineties. Somehow, from today’s perspective, those seemed like much more secure times, certainly as a background to one’s formative years. But I’ll end with a quotation from an earlier struggle: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that.” Martin Luther King Jr, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*

Tim Wotherspoon Tuesday 6 June 2017