

## **District Councillor's Report for The Mordens Ward SCDC March 2020**

### **Planning**

At the last planning committee we were given less than 24hrs to make an incredibly difficult and complex decision around the scheme of delegation for planning. Many councillors, like myself, expressed their dissatisfaction and concern that we were put in a position that we were making such a decision in a rushed and chaotic manner. There were 6 options put forward with the first option proposing that the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development make the decision of which applications were to come to committee in consultation with the chairman. This was not welcomed by many residents, nor myself, as this leads to an impression of officers "marking their own homework". The Leader of the Council recently contacted all parishes to reassure them that the Chairman of Planning would have a veto, however this was not deemed legally possible and so the 6 options at the eleventh hour were given to us to choose from. I felt that for us to take such a decision while parishes had been given a false sense of security (via the veto) was wrong and so I proposed a temporary stopgap (cited below) to provide us some time to properly think through the options and at least make parishes aware that the veto was no longer possible before we made an alternative decision. I believe there was sympathy for my proposal but that did not result in enough votes, and my proposal was voted down. After this fell I pushed for an automatic referral option so the power of the agenda was with parishes and members, instead of officers, but this was lost and the majority of committee members voted to approve the first proposal without the veto. I think this approach means that elected members have not lost their authority in this but have given it away. One thing that was unanimous at the planning committee was that there needs to be a full review of this and it should happen as soon as possible. Following this meeting however at the full council on the 20<sup>th</sup> February, it was raised by a member of the public that the planning committee did not have authority to make this decision and that it must be full council that decides on any changes to the constitution. Councillors have now been notified that it would be advisable that at the full council meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April that full council will now need to vote on this change. I will of course make parish councils aware of the outcome of this meeting, I shall be pushing for as much democratic involvement in this process as possible yet again at full council, but I would welcome any of the parishes views on this in preparation for this meeting.

Proposal by Cllr Heather Williams, planning committee 12th February 2020:

"The receipt of a request for call in by a parish council within 21 days, or a member within 28 days, of notification is referred automatically to Committee –

where material planning considerations are cited by the parish or member for seeking such a decision

This will take place for the next 6 weeks to allow full scrutiny and time to digest a way forward given the short time we have had to assess the options. During this 6 weeks the committee will sit more often, as often as is necessary, to ensure decisions are not delayed.”

### **Budget Day at Scamb**

At the February full council meeting the administration set the business plan and budget for the forthcoming year. There were elements of the budget which I and others welcomed, for example the proposal to put money towards improving the environment, however I did disagree with how the money was being spent. £1.8 million is being spent to make South Cambs Hall an “exemplar” building, my belief was that this money should be spent on a way of helping residents to reduce their carbon footprint for example providing fast speed charging points or looking into community heating schemes given how dependant we are in South Cambs on oil. There is also budget for electric bin lorries, the views from officers have been mixed as to if this is an appropriate direction for the council at this stage. They are a very new technology and have been tested so far in areas such as London, my concern is that the council will rush through with this in order to be one of the first as opposed to analysing whether this will truly work in South Cambs. I would like to reiterate that I am not opposing £5 million investment in green improvements, but I do not agree with how the money is being spent.

It has also been budgeted for a decrease, in comparison to last year’s budget, in relation to planning. This being a 17.5% reduction was something I thought worthy of challenge as this means nearly £1million less for the department. It was questioned how much of the budget was due to be spent on consultants, this was unanswered but written answers will be provided in due course. I shall be pursuing these answers as I do not believe it is good for the planning department, nor value for money, to be as heavily dependant on consultants as it has been, in last years budget it was clearly shown as a near million pounds.

Last year I wrote about my concern of the £3million gap in the council’s budget I am even deeper concerned with the £5.683 million gap between now and 2025. This alongside an increased investment strategy that has gone from £100million to £340million. This level of borrowing is unlikely to be paid off within the next 50 years and I must question whether this is really the right direction for the council to be going in. Overall this led me to a point where I felt unable to support the General Fund Revenue Budget, Capital Programme or General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### **Funding for VE Day celebrations**

The deadline to apply for grants in relation to VE day celebrations is 15th March, it can go towards one-off costs for projects that leave a legacy, such as a commemorative bench or plaque or a memorial in the centre of a village.

### **Workshop**

There is a Zero Carbon Communities Workshop: 7<sup>th</sup> March 1:30pm at the council offices.

### **East West Rail**

Government has now announced that the route for East West rail will now be via Cambourne, this is something that has been hard fought for from those across the political and non-political spectrum, and news that I truly welcome.

### **New Taxi License policy**

A new taxi policy has been adopted unanimously by members of the South Cambs. One of the updates that have been in the pipeline for several years now is CCTV in taxis. This is something that I think is a welcome improvement for public safety. Another requirement in the new policy is a timetable for taxis to become 100% ultra-low or zero emission vehicles by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2028, I think this is a great way of helping reduce emissions.

### **Cllr Heather Williams**

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