

# **Borough Councillor's Missive.**

**August 2009**

## **The Diary.**

It seems a long time since I wrote the last Missive and with the holidays in full flow as I write this one, we are looking forward to a break ourselves. The Council agenda has been pretty heavy over recent weeks in particular the amount of work required by the Zero Based Budget groups. Also the first meeting (against all of the odds) of the Sywell Aerodrome JCC took place on 28<sup>th</sup> July, more details below. The only area of Council business showing a reduction is Planning, clear evidence of the depths of this Recession with a significant reduction in the number of applications and indeed the size of the developments.

You might recall that I sit as an Observer Member on the West Northants Joint Planning Committee. This was in Towcester earlier in the month when the Council Chamber was picketed by peaceful Protesters The Chair allowed a significant number (limited for safety reasons) to attend the meeting in the Chamber. It was a very interesting session and it would be prudish of me to say all of the protesters were in fact "nimbies". I believe we are in great danger of destroying this once beautiful county, by over development indeed we may have already done so.

I therefore was pleased to attend the meeting in Overstone to ostensibly to discuss the West Northants Emergent Joint Core Strategy. At the meeting in Overstone the Officers from the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit making the presentation were left in no uncertain terms as to the feelings of the audience, who had come from Boughton, and Moulton as well as Overstone. Why there can even be a consideration to destroying valuable agricultural land to achieve some hypothetical population growth is beyond me and I have yet to see any figures and justification to warrant the amount of proposed homes in the area of Overstone. The draft proposals clearly show what is called coalescence and this has been deprecated in the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit program so how it can be allowed in West Northants perhaps shows the confusion among planners. I do not think we should be left with a legacy of confused planning. Recently a Government Minister Hilary Benn gave a Press Conference and extolled the virtues of growing enough food to feed ourselves. Perhaps someone can explain to me how, if we cover all of our agricultural land with concrete and bricks and allow uncontrolled immigration, we can grow more food. Just another anomaly of this exhausted Government.

At the time of the Overstone meeting I was not aware that there was a possible Planning application to build on the area known as Southfields, this is the area to the south of Moulton Rd leaving Overstone in the direction of the A43. I am informed that this land is high quality agricultural.

## **Council Meetings**

During this period of relative "austerity" budgets across the Council are under serious pressure, none more so than that the Castle Theatre. I have mentioned before that the Castle is in my view a most valuable asset to the town and should be retained, but not at all costs! We recently had a request for additional funding of £100,000 I am personally concerned that numerous requests for "extra funding" indicate a certain lack of control in the management. We can recall that in 2006 the then Director of the Castle was found guilty of defrauding the Company of some £600k. The Council has supported the Management through this very difficult period but the time is fast approaching where we need to more fully understand the true costs of the business. I for one will object to the payment of any further monies without a full accounting. If that means a root and branch review then so be it. I will not be party to wasting tax payers money,

The July Council Meeting saw another of those unusual events in this Council, as most will understand Wellingborough Council is a "Committee run" Council, that is to say that the vast majority of business is agreed in Committee and then ratified at Full Council. On this occasion it was agreed that the full Council should vote in the issue of "On Street Parking Permits" in the area of the Railway Station. This is a vexed issue as the problem is caused by the extortionately high parking charges made by the railway company. This company are so arrogant that they would rather have a virtually empty car park (the old Higgins site) than reduce the cost and enable all train users to park "off street". The net result is that the Council voted by a small majority to go ahead with Permit only parking on number of streets adjacent to the station. Unfortunately the costs to the Council Tax payer could be as much as £40k however I am not sure how this solves the problem as train users will simply park further away. What is interesting to note is that the car parking charges (so I understand) made by the same company at Corby are almost half those at Wellingborough. But guess what! Corby is a Labour run Council and with a Labour MP!

## **Wellingborough Market**

I sit on the Market sub-committee and, having listened to the complaints of the Stall Holders and Traders over recent meetings we decided it was time to go and have a "good look see" during market days. The current layout of the market is such that there are three disparate sections comprising Market Street, Pebble Lane and Market Square.

Those traders in Market Square appear to be suffering most from the drop in "footfall" and on the occasions we were there it was obvious that foot traffic from the bus stops in Church Street would walk past the Church and

straight down Pebble Lane missing the main market because it is under occupied by stallholders. On the other hand pedestrians from the Morrison's direction and the footpaths from the west side of the town would pass directly across Market Street into Swansgate, also missing the main market area! The short term answer until the upturn in the economy may well be to bring all (or most) of the Market together in Market Street. I envisage that Market Street will require some changes to allow many more traders than at present but clearly giving the impression of a "bustling area". Then as the economy improves the market can be expanded up the western side of the old Woolworths building. In the meantime the newly freed area at the northern end of the Market Square could be used for parking.

#### Sywell Aerodrome Joint Consultative Committee (SAJCC)

Finally, some 39 years late, on July 28<sup>th</sup> the SAJCC met. Sywell Aerodrome is now compliant with its Statutory responsibilities in the requirement as a "Designated Aerodrome" to fulfil the legal compliance with Section 35 of the 1982 Civil Aviation Act and its predecessor in the 1968 Act. But let's not get too excited, it is one thing to have a committee and another to have an effective committee. Indeed in the early part of July, the Company banned me from all parts of the aerodrome including the Public Car Park! This in turn implied that I could not attend the first SAJCC, as it was to be held on the aerodrome. The company were told in no uncertain terms that they may be able to ban Jim Bass but could not ban Councillor Bass!

Unfortunately apart from one or two most interesting items the meeting was something of a "damp squib". I am in no doubt that the Chair was "conscripted" and was not too keen to be there. Leading pointers such as wishing to get on with the agenda without introductions and attempting to allow members of the public to attend when it was supposed to be a private meeting and in my view should be the only private meeting of this group. The full minutes of the meeting will be placed on all of the local websites as below.

The two points of interest are as follows:

- a) Formal complaints made to Wellingborough Council about flying activities are logged at WBC and a fax of the complaint sent to Sywell Aerodrome. (I had previously asked WBC for a list of all complaints for the period 2007 to date. Unfortunately the complaints for the whole of 2008 are missing and this will be investigated separately). The aerodrome manager gave a copy of list of complaints to his office over the past four months, to each of the members of the committee. I checked his list and found it did not include any of details that were on the list from WBC. On questioning it appears that (according to the MDs secretary) that the faxes are received and passed to the MD but never forwarded to the Aerodrome Manager (AM), so suddenly the managers list of complaints has quadrupled but no action appears to have been taken!.
- b) Flight Protocol. At the public inquiry a document titled Flight Protocol was part of the Environmental statement this document is supposed to identify the routes etc aircraft will use when arriving, departing and "in circuit". The Aerodrome Manager presented an A3 version of the Flight Protocol to the Committee. Knowing some of the time delays in implementing these processes I asked the AM how long it would take to implement, his response was staggering when he said "I do not know, as the first time I saw this document was yesterday (27<sup>th</sup>)" He then continued that it was unacceptable to him as helicopters were meant to depart on the almost identical track as aircraft using the 03/21 runway" which in his view was unsafe.

I mentioned earlier that I had been banned from the aerodrome but we did enjoy an after meeting drink on the 28<sup>th</sup>, I am not sure that was such a good idea, as at the time of writing this missive I have just been informed that there was a successful prosecution in the Wellingborough Court by WBC against Sywell Aerodrome for failing to comply with Health & Safety regulations in the cleansing of the beer delivery system. This followed a complaint by a member of the public who said that he felt "seriously ill and suffered from internal physical harm.." after drinking some beer which had been contaminated by the beer line cleaner. The company was fined £4,000 and had costs of some £1780 awarded against them.

As ever if you have any queries please contact me and remember, I cannot help you if I do not know of your problem.

**Jim Bass**

*(Councillor for Sywell, Ecton and Mears Ashby, Wellingborough Borough Council)*

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This Missive can now be seen on the following web sites and inc:

[www.sywellvillage.com](http://www.sywellvillage.com)

[www.ectonvillage.co.uk](http://www.ectonvillage.co.uk)

[www.mearsashbyparishcouncil.com](http://www.mearsashbyparishcouncil.com)