

The Diary.

We spent three glorious weeks in France in August a country we had not visited for many years, I have a secret penchant for France and it would be my second choice country to move to. Towing the caravan on the back of the 4 by 4, we arrived in the Ardech  on the third day of a fairly easy drive, it was very warm about 35 C. Next we went to the Cote d' Azur where it was very hot, around 41 C. It was impossible for us to go to the beach before about 6pm as obviously it was simply too hot! From the Cote d'Azur we headed north then east to find the cooler climes east of Grenoble and into the Alps. This is an area of France we had never visited and it has some of the most spectacular views and drives I have seen anywhere. From the alps we headed back north and stayed at a Campsite called Le Forge de Sainte Marie north of Dijon. We met a young man from the UK who was doing a sponsored ride to Venice more than 1,000 miles!. I thought he was crazy until I remembered some of things I did in my youth. His name is Dan Beedon and he comes from Oundle. He is an environmental scientist and was raising money for Sea Shepherds, you may go to his web site at www.justgiving.com/2wheelstoVenice/. I was left with the thought that if we have enough Dan Beeden's our earth will be made safe for many generations to come. At this juncture I should interject that the trip was not without interruption I had many phone calls about the aerobatics and noise from Sywell Airport. The sad death of the American pilot at Silverstone is testimony as to how dangerous aerobatics can be but I always maintain that it is one thing for the pilot to carry out dangerous activities and it is quite different for any pilot to endanger the community with those actions. There is no doubt that the vast majority of pilots are absolutely committed to safety but there are always some who are not. It was reported that aircraft were carrying out aerobatics over Stonelea Rd and Westlea Rd, if you see this happening you must try and take photographs with reference points such as the rooftop of a house, let me have the pics and I will take it from there. Alternatively you can telephone WBC and lodge a complaint. On the subject of Stonelea Rd I did receive a phone call informing me that there were men in "green overalls" at the end of the road by the field. I thought it was a joke but apparently not. The men were site surveying for the possibility of the affordable homes project.

Council Meetings

As August is a quiet month for Council Meetings there are only a couple of issues to report.

Development Committee

We are now reaching the stage with the Town Centre program where we have to start the selection of the materials palette for pathways and roads in the centre area. The Consultants have agreed to create an area of the sample materials for us to review and arrange to bring in some samples of the preferred types of furniture such as seats, bollards, bins and signposts etc.

We also had a presentation on the Car Parking Options for the Town Centre both during and after the development. This report of some thirty pages was probably one of the worst reports I have seen during my time at the Council, factually it was overburdened. It also attempted to consider Parking Charges throughout the Town, this is a clear contradiction of this Administration's policy. The report was rejected. I have subsequently asked for the costs of this report to be presented for scrutiny as it was, in my view, a significant waste of money.

Partnership Review

This committee is part of the scrutiny role of the Council. At this month's meeting we received a joint presentation from North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (NNJPU), North Northants Development Corporation (NNDC) and Northamptonshire Enterprise Ltd (NEL). Members of WBC sit on the Boards or Management Committees on each of these bodies. Two main issues came to mind with these presentations, the first being value for money I estimate that between them they cost WBC around  150k per annum directly, there may be separate charges for other work. It is no secret that there are conflicts between the work that the NNJPU and NNDC do and the wishes of the Council Membership. The reasons for this are very simple (and indeed are the same for the West Northants area currently vexing Overstone residents), the agenda has been set by Central Government. That agenda is based on statistics that quite frankly simply do not and (in my view) never did make any sense. The inward migration was ridiculous; the job creation even before the Recession, was woefully inadequate; the concreting of prime agricultural land is stupid beyond any sensible rationale especially as we now have Hilary Benn demanding that we grow more of our own food, perhaps someone should tell him that corn does not grow through concrete! The officers of the three organisations were suitably grilled for nearly an hour and now have a much better understanding of our sentiments. We also expressed the concern that Corby was benefiting more than either Kettering or Wellingborough, from their efforts.

West Northants Joint Planning Committee

Last month we discussed the high level strategy of the development program and its affect on the residents of Overstone, Moulton and Boughton. I am pleased to support those residents in their actions to remove this Option from the program. I can also confirm that our Officer who sits with me at WNJPC concurs with this view and a report with recommendations is being prepared in time for the 30th September deadline. The report includes comments such as *“a response to Question 27, should state that whilst some development at Northampton North may be appropriate, the scale proposed is unnecessarily large and proposals must avoid coalescence with the linear settlement of Overstone – Sywell”*.

We further take the view that the weakness of the infrastructure planning would leave the area bereft of proper roads, no real improvement in employment and a possible risk of creating “sink” estates but ultimately there is insufficient evidence to support the so called inward migration figures in fact I understand the current trend in part is an exodus.

A Councillors lot!

At the end of July I was informed by our Monitoring Officer at WBC that he had received a formal complaint about my conduct from the Managing Director of Sywell Aerodrome. Whilst I cannot discuss the details of the allegations I can say that not only will the complaints be vigorously rejected they will be negated but I do hope that the Standards Committee indeed decide to hold a full and proper Inquiry.

This issue however does raise the question which seems to be taxing to some sections of our community and that is the relationship between being a Ward Councillor and that of a Borough Councillor. I am both, but they are not one and the same.

Firstly as I sit on a number of policy/regulatory making committees, these committees by definition exercise the rights of power invested in them but all decisions are ratified by Full Council. They then become Council policies and are publicised accordingly.

Secondly as a Ward Councillor my job is to receive the comments of the constituents of the Ward and if thought fit discuss with Officers at WBC or if other Government agencies are involved then I may contact them directly. I receive up to ten comments /complaints each and every week.

I like every other person in the country have the right to request data of public bodies under the Freedom of Information Act.

For the purposes of clarity all of my e-mails and Newsletters are signed as below, this format was agreed with the previous Monitoring Officer at Wellingborough, Mr David Seabrooke just after I was elected.

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:

www.ectonvillage.co.uk

www.mearsashbyparishcouncil.com