

Borough Councillor's Missive. January 2010

The Diary.

First of all, a Happy and Healthy New Year to you!

We have certainly had a winter (up to now) the likes of which we have not seen for many years but to the "not so" older generation we experienced these "kinds" of winters almost yearly until the beginning of the nineties. The difference today of course is that there is much more traffic on the road and we have all witnessed the news pictures showing cars with wheels spinning at a great rate, were they trying to burn their way out of the snow? I have been impressed with the Highways crews who have been out almost every night over the past four weeks but equally I have had some complaints about the non gritting of Ecton Lane in Sywell, Wellingborough Rd, North St. in Mears Ashby and the High St in Ecton. Just in case you are not aware, the County's roads are divided into groups P1, P2 and P3 and the details of the gritting regime can be found on the County Council web site under Salting. In principle P1 roads are gritted round the clock when temperatures are below freezing, then P2 roads are done and providing P1 & P2 are properly ice free then the crews move onto P3 roads.

Council

The recent press announcement of the pending retirement of the WBC Chief Executive Lyn Martin-Bennison came as no real surprise to many of the Members of the Administration and whilst I have had many disagreements with her during the past two years mainly over the fiasco of Sywell Aerodrome, I would like to take this opportunity of wishing her a long and healthy retirement.

Planning

At the meeting this month one major application taxed the Committee, that of the additional sports field for Earls Barton, this village, now almost a town of some 6,000 residents boasts a group of six cricket teams for all ages and as many football teams etc. Interestingly the village had employed a consultancy to make the representations, which was not unique, but the application was for consent on land not owned by the community or the sports organisations. It was their intention then to begin a Compulsory Purchase Order process to acquire the land!

West Northants Joint Planning Committee

The meeting this month was very interesting and I am heartened that commonsense may yet prevail over the idea of blanketing the South and West of our county with concrete. The meeting in the South Northants Council Office in Towcester was well attended and we were introduced to the new Head of the JPU, David Atkinson. I had not been impressed with the previous Interim Head, not just because she was carrying out a Government agenda but the way she went about it.

We had a very heated debate with most Members focussing on the growth trajectory. It is clear that the very foundations of the calculations were in my view fundamentally flawed, these will now be reviewed by the Planning Committee following work by the Planning unit and a revised trajectory initialised. I say initialised because this process must by definition be dynamic and not be cast in stone. Many have considered the WNDP to be monolithic and totally intransigent. I know some of the members of this group and find them individually to be very reasonable. However the latest government edicts states:

"The West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNSDC), which supports regeneration in Northampton, Daventry and Towcester, will now concentrate on strategic delivery of key projects with more joint working with partners. This will release efficiencies, find new ways of working and savings across organisations.

WNSDC will return planning responsibilities to the local planning authorities. It is currently responsible for applications of 50 or more homes as well as most applications in the centre of Northampton. It is intended that from April 2011 it will concentrate on planning applications for schemes of 200 homes or more and major commercial schemes across the area".

Hopefully we will now see an end to the nonsense of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) which puts fear into many people of our community and artificially hyped the value of land for the landowners.

Wellingborough North Development (3,000 homes etc near Redhill Grange)

Just before Christmas WBC after a vote by Council, decided to ask the Secretary of State to re-open the Inquiry in order to the review the allotment of affordable homes. Government strategy allows for 30%, this application was considered unviable at that rate so a figure 20% was applied. You will recall that he had stated he was minded to "allow the application subject to the Council signing a Deed (to sell the land owned by WBC for development)". He has refused to allow the Inquiry to be re-opened and "invited" the Council to sign the deed. I believe that if we do not, he will sign it on our behalf and therefore overrule local democracy!!!

Sywell Aerodrome

The Company has now issued a Summons against both myself and WBC. The Summons reads "*Sywell Aerodrome Ltd is claiming its costs in defending its position and disproving allegations made by Councillor Bass...*". The alleged costs are £1,562.78.

So let see how this will work out, first of all there is no legal cause by which such allegations can be proven, secondly this is the Management who damaged the woodland after the consummation of the works, in an agreement with the Forestry Commission which was signed off on April, 7th 2009. They also filled in a ditch for some 100mtrs in breach of the Land Drainage Act and "*accidentally grubbed out a hedge*" for some 100mtrs! They will be replacing the hedge in the next few weeks and the Environment Agency or land owners will decide when the ditch will be rectified. **Their position is, surely, absolutely indefensible.**

Sywell Aerodrome Joint Consultative Committee

The meeting held in the Sywell Village in November was unfortunately nothing short of a farce. I voiced some concerns in my Missive of August. Indeed it was some 6 weeks before we received the Minutes of the July meeting and it is now (17th Jan) 7 weeks since the last meeting and still no Minutes. Clearly there is no real intent by the Company to hold a proper JCC and if further evidence were needed then all of those who were in the Village Hall in November will recall the grovelling apology by the Chairman because he had failed to inform the Committee that he was in business with Sywell Aerodrome's aviation consultant. The Chairman is supposed to be independent as is the Secretariat and the Vice Chairman none of whom are and therefore they should all go sooner rather than later. In the words of one well respected member of the community "*we have been stitched up again*".

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

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

www.ectonvillage.co.uk

www.mearsashbyparishcouncil.com