

Borough Councillor's Missive Sept 2010

The Diary.

August is a quiet time for meetings at Council but we kicked off the autumn session with some energy! August for us was a time to get away and so we did, heading out to Lake Garda in Italy with the caravan. It was however not without incident as we had a wheel come off the caravan at around 55mph just south of the San Gothard tunnel in Switzerland. This gave us an enforced "layover" at place called Airolo. We had to park for some three days in the alpine resort car park whilst new parts were delivered and a repair effected to enable us to get to Lake Garda. Once there we enjoyed ourselves for some four weeks.

I was disappointed that the aerobatic competition in July was seriously curtailed due to the weather but I understand that the August air show was a great success. We returned just in time to see the LAA rally what a panoply of aircraft there was flying that weekend!

Development

This Committee met and had a very interesting agenda. One of the most important issues is that of housing development across the Borough. With the removal of the Regional Spatial Strategy by the new Government it feels like we have been set free. There is no doubt that the burden of the housing demands by the last Government was extremely onerous. Now we will have control of housing developments. A working Group has been set up to review potential areas. They include but are not limited to the following: Irchester, Wollaston, Earls Barton, Finedon and Croyland Ward, discussions are at a very early stage so absolutely no conclusions can yet be drawn. The Government is looking overall for more house-building and is proposing financial incentives to encourage local authorities and communities to increase their aspirations for housing and economic growth. It is likely but as yet uncertain that financial incentives will be available. This may be in the form of the existing Revenue Grant, meaning that authorities that do not embrace development may lose resources, potentially resulting in higher council tax!

On the subject of Planning, over the past few weeks I have been involved in a number of contentious planning applications in the Ward. Whilst I cannot discuss the specific individual details there are a number of principles that need to be remembered. First of all I will invariably represent the views of the Parish Councils in the Ward at the full WBC Planning Committee. Having sat on this committee for nearly two years I now have a pretty good idea of the plans that my colleagues would accept, although I can still be surprised. Secondly if the Parish Council does not express a view (and that would be unusual) then I will take a considered view of the application and if required, make that representation to the Planning Committee. There is however always one overarching complication and that is the role of the Planning Inspectorate, having seen some applications rejected by WBC only to find the appeal upheld by an Inspector! Over the past few years we have improved our wins to losses ratio but there has still been a lot of unpredictability from the Inspectors. I hope the new government can improve the guidance to the Inspectors to make them far more compliant with the wishes of the local community.

Another Interesting item on the Development Committee agenda was the:
Northamptonshire's County Climate Change Strategy 2010-2014

This is a document that furthers and co-ordinates partnership working across the County in this area and particular the role played by this Council in the Borough of Wellingborough, with the three main objectives

- Raise awareness of the issue of Climate Change and its impact on Northamptonshire
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the County
- Plan for and adapt to the predicted impacts of Climate Change.

Wellingborough Borough Council has significantly reduced its own carbon footprint over the past four years and of course saved a significant amount of money. The timing of this item is most interesting as we are also looking to increase the degree of forestation in the area and thus increase the rate of Carbon Dioxide absorption.

Finally on the Agenda was the item to discuss the compliance of Sywell Aerodrome with all of its Planning Conditions. A full report and any relevant action will be taken in the near future.

Resources

Probably the most important business for this committee is to oversee the financial savings required as a result of the recession. The Committee was presented with a number of options for a “business transforming plan” (what a statement!). This will be the third transformation since I have been a Councillor. In general the options did not satisfy the committee in so far as the streamlining of the business was concerned and the motion was amended so that the Officers could produce another option with more vertical management I have long failed to understand what appears to be a very unwieldy structure and hopefully we will get a new dynamic council out of this exercise. We have some very good officers but I sense some feel very inhibited. It is my view that good management enables talented people to express themselves and there is no doubt performance and moral improves significantly. Oppressive management can never really succeed but then there is a world of a difference between private business and council business, but should there be?

Sywell Aerodrome

The company had earlier applied for an extension to the land levelling licence to import inert materials for the purpose of levelling the land on the extension area of the grass runway 33. I was concerned that many had complained to me about the mud on the road and the fact that trucks were both going through the old village or up the Wellingborough Rd towards Moonshine Gap. I made the case to the County Council Planning committee and they have agreed to increase the policing of the compliance of the conditions. All trucks arriving with inert materials for the landfill must come from the roundabout on the A43 down to the Bellman Gate. It is a breach of the conditions if they travel up the Holcot Lane. Further, sampling of the material will also increase as a result of some samples failing the waste acceptance criteria

The JCC descended into a farce following the meeting in July to which many of you attended. Just a few days prior to the meeting the “Chairman” informed the members that he had cancelled the meeting after discussions with the Vice Chairman and SAL. The CE of WBC advised the members that he could not see how the chairman had the authority to take this action. I also took separate legal advice with the same conclusions, apparently the Chairman objected to me sitting on the committee. All of the elected members except the County Councillor attended the meeting which went ahead as it was quorate. The Company however informed the council that none of its appointed members of the committee would attend (as did some of the aviation members). As the meeting needed a Chairman Mr Ian Thompson offered his services, we had also to conscript a Secretary for the evening. I want personally thank Ian and Sonia for doing a great job. I know Ian will be embarrassed by these accolades but he is an exceptionally qualified person. Although his politics are diametrically opposed to mine, I totally respect this fact and that democracy allows us to work together on community issues. The company and its Aerodrome Manager seem to think the committee should be and is “owned” by the company, this is absolute nonsense. The DfT guidelines that the company appears to want to reject, are quite clear and state:

6.6 Airport management. *It is essential that the airport management participate fully in the committee proceedings by offering items for the agenda, attending meetings and by providing relevant information on the operation of the airport. As the committee's role is to advise the airport management we recommend that airport officers should preferably not be formally members of the committee. It may also, in some cases, detract from the public perception of the committee's independence.*

Further the company is required by law to “provide the facilities” for the JCC and currently is refusing to pay the invoice for the Village Hall.

A vote of no-confidence in the previous Chairman Mr J. Bowden was passed and he has subsequently accepted this decision, the same vote was passed on the Secretariat. We now need to get the committee working again with a permanent and proper Chairman and Secretary and ensure compliance with both the Planning Conditions and the Statutory requirements, both of which are law.

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

Jim Bass

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The Missive can now be seen on: www.ectonvillage.co.uk : www.mearsashbyparishcouncil.com