

Longstanton Parish Council District Council Report 2017 / 2018

This is the 16th Annual Report I have given, and it will be my last. Though I was tempted to stand again, I feel that having represented you through 16 turbulent years is enough.

I originally joined the Parish Council for two reasons. It was a dysfunctional shambles, with two warring factions at each other's throats the whole time, and also it was quite happy for the village to be integrated into Northstowe with no separation at all.

In fact the origin of my village email list, currently with some 650 addresses on it, was to enable those of us who were determined to defend the village and prevent it being destroyed by Northstowe to keep in contact. It then became a means for me to keep the village informed about important District Council matters – not just Northstowe. But it has also become a means whereby I can circulate details of meetings, church services, village events etc. The list is now at a watershed, for two reasons. Firstly, when I am no longer your District Councillor I will have no relevant council information to impart. Secondly, in a month's time new legislation comes into force, the General Data Protection Regulation. This is designed to ensure that no-one receives any unwanted email communications. I have spoken with Libby White, our parish clerk. The parish wishes to set up its own village email list and it makes sense for my list to be subsumed into that. So what I intend to do shortly is to email all recipients of my emails with a form for them to email to Libby if they wish to be included on the new village list. If I could reassure those on the list: I have never passed on anyone's email address and I won't be doing that now.

If I could just indulge myself briefly, I would like to mention some of my achievements. Don't worry – it's quite a short list. I managed to prevent our village green being cut into three by looping Over Road round to meet the High Street in the middle. Yes, really! This was complicated because it involved 4 parties: The District and County Councils, the developer and the landowner, the last two of whom were not on speaking terms. I got the pavement alongside the brook installed at the same time. I ensured that Annington Homes sold what is now the doctors' surgery to Willingham Medical Practice and also stopped them selling off the play areas on Magdalene Close for yet more housing. I got the Northstowe plans modified so that the large balancing ponds along Hattons Road got built in order to reduce the village's flood risk. But all these events were in the first half of my tenure. Latterly I have become disillusioned because it has become harder and harder for an elected councillor to make any difference. It is heartbreaking to go to a Planning meeting and speak against a dreadful planning application, only for it to be granted anyway, or, just as bad, be granted on appeal.

The problem we have is that the government has given desirable areas like South Cambridgeshire targets for housebuilding that are virtually unachievable and then, because we do not appear to have enough available land for five years' building requirements, declare us to have no Local Plan. This enables virtually any planning application in virtually any location to be granted on appeal. It is small wonder that councillors become demoralised. Particularly in an election year, it is easy for outsiders to say that the Council is failing. The problem is that the system is broken. It simultaneously fails to get enough houses built whilst allowing totally unsuitable ones to get consent.

Northstowe is a case in point. I used to be a member of the South Cambs Northstowe committee which considered every aspect of any Northstowe application in detail. It was a cross-party committee and most of us had been working on Northstowe for 10 years so there

was a huge amount of experience. Since it was axed eighteen months ago major Northstowe items compete with a dozen other applications for the overworked Planning Committee to deal with at their monthly meetings. Northstowe has essentially become a democracy-free zone.

Seventeen years ago two friends of mine set up Longstanton Life and I volunteered to report on the goings-on at the Parish Council. Believe me, there were some goings-on! At that time it seemed impossible to find out what was going on in the village and in the various Councils. Since I became Chair of the Parish Council and then the District Councillor I have made it my job to try to keep the village informed on what was going on, both by email and via Longstanton Life. I would particularly like to thank Tony Cowley for the encouragement and support he gave me in the early years, and thank Longstanton Life for publishing my articles and being tolerant of my inevitable late submissions. I hope my successors will do as much to keep us informed.

The village is a very different place now from 16 years ago. We gained Magdalene Close, Thornhill Place, Thatchers Wood and Rampton Drift when the old military homes were sold off, and all the Home Farm homes. At the St George's day afternoon last Saturday I kept reminding myself just how much more vibrant a place it has become. Long may this continue!

I wish you all well for the future.

Alex Riley 23 April 2018