

Longstanton Parish Council District Council Report 2016 / 2017

I originally stood as your District Councillor in 2004, because I was convinced that I was the right person to represent our village at the time that the key Northstowe decisions were being made. I thought that one four-year term should be quite enough for this to happen. It is incredible to look back to those times and recall that our planning officers were confidently telling us that Northstowe would be delivering 600 homes per year from 2006!

I stood again in 2008 for much the same reasons, only for the entire Northstowe project to get stuck in the mire of the recession.

I stood once more in 2012, and again in 2016!

And suddenly, in this past year, Northstowe is really happening. The area south of the guided busway is no longer recognisable from what it was two years ago. The first homes are appearing west of the B1050. Tomorrow I'll be attending the official "opening" of Northstowe.

Goodness me, it's been a long haul.

The current status of Northstowe is that the construction of the Bloor homes site is under way and that every other parcel of land on Phase 1, the old golf course, comprising some 1500 homes, has a builder's name against it. Earlier today I attended a briefing on Phase 2. The Homes and Communities Agency intends to start work on the required infrastructure early next year, which will include the creation of the Southern Access Road going across to just north of Bar Hill, and balancing ponds south of the Guided Busway. First housing delivery is scheduled for Spring 2019. This seems extraordinarily optimistic, given that they will not be able to deliver housing until the A14 upgrade is complete.

The extraordinary volume of soil movement from the site to the East of the B1050 completed last autumn but the site has been left as a terrible mess. I understand that all the earthworks will now be completed by the end of June. The soft landscaping will be planted at the end of this year.

There are concerns that the Phase 1 site has been aggressively "de-watered", resulting in the level of local ponds and boreholes becoming far too low. Gallagher's have commissioned a report which is due to be available by the end of May. SCDC have written to Gallagher's pointing out local residents' requirements that this report is robust. It does not help that the past few months have seen historically low rainfall locally.

As I'm sure you are all aware, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough now have an elected Mayor. I have never been a fan of this proposal. South Cambs and Cambridge form a coherent unit, which could include Huntingdon. Peterborough is also a coherent unit, as are the fen areas of East Cambridgeshire and Fenland. But to cobble them all together in one entity does not make much sense to me. No decision can be made by this new Combined Authority unless the Mayor supports it and it takes a 2/3 majority of members of the new CA to vote down any proposal of the mayor. The jury is out on how much of a success this experiment will prove to be. I was delighted to be appointed as a member of the Scrutiny Committee for this new authority and hope to be re-appointed at our council's AGM shortly.

Being elected to public office is not without its risks and it can attract all kinds of unwelcome and unfair attention. I am relieved that a bizarre and intensely unpleasant episode has recently completed which involved some members of the parish council and myself. As many of you are aware in the time running up to the PC elections in May 2012 a combination

of incompetence by senior parish councillors and fraud by the then parish clerk Pauline Haywood resulted in the parish council losing some £70,000 and becoming essentially bankrupt. Back in October 2013 a Swavesey resident called Vance Wells approached the parish council. He claimed to be a forensic accountant and offered his services free of charge to the parish council in order to build a case against the former parish clerk. It rapidly became clear that he was not someone with whom the PC could work and they almost immediately told him not to proceed.

Mr Wells response to this was to become increasingly obsessed with the case and this culminated with an extraordinary meeting of our PC in March 2014 which was called in order to make public that he was not entitled to claim to be working on behalf of the parish council. At this meeting he gave a meandering speech of over 30 minutes, ignoring all requests from the chair, at which he claimed to have earth-shattering discoveries in connection with Ms Haywood, though in spite of repeated requests he produced no evidence.

At this point Mr Wells formulated a totally fictitious case against some parish councillors, accusing them of covering-up for Ms Haywood – though they had not even been remotely involved with the PC when all the money disappeared.

Mr Wells went quiet for a bit, though he was continually pestering our clerk with demands for information which she did not have.

And then in August 2015 he came out with a completely new angle. The villain of the piece, he now decided, was none other than myself. He came out with a stream of outrageous and libellous allegations against me which he copied far and wide via email. This went on for several months. He demanded that I make a payment of £2.8 million to him which he would use to effect some restitution for my “misdeeds”. He also submitted wild and totally false complaints against me to South Cambs. Eventually the police served an anti-harassment order on him, under which he was not to contact me any more. His immediate response was an email to me and the policeman concerned saying that he now realised that I had got away with things for so long because I had the police in my pocket! This was followed by a torrent of complaint letters to the Chief Constable, Independent Police Complaints Commission etc.

And so it went on. He never produced a shred of evidence to support his allegations, which incidentally were also all entirely false.

Last month Mr Wells was given a suspended sentence, having already been found guilty of harassment and stalking against me. He narrowly avoided imprisonment. Importantly he is also barred from our tennis club, Pavilion and Black Bull. When he protested, it was pointed out that his own village has a tennis club and pubs. He richly deserves his criminal record.

I cannot tell you how relieved I am that this matter is now history. It goes to show that life as an elected representative can have unexpected unpleasant aspects.

Alex Riley 10 May 2017