

Opposition Leader's Address to Full Council Annual Meeting 2015: Cllr Bridget Smith

When I first became a councillor, 7 years ago, I thought that no one would ever talk to me about anything ever again other than dog poo and wheelie bins.

Since then we have moved into a new world where we are all concerned with major issues which are going to determine what South Cambridgeshire will look like long after we are dead and which will define the quality of life for tens of thousands of people for decades to come.

And though I have the gravest reservations about many of these issues I acknowledge that in certain areas we are doing a good job despite the ongoing pressure to make cuts which inevitably result in reduced services.

Our Homelessness Team continue to excel despite an ever increasing and complex workload. The Benefits Team has supported numerous households to avoid falling victim to the gross unfairness of the bedroom tax, and the Housing Team continue to deliver more affordable properties to meet the ever increasing demand.

However, the bigger picture is bleak. The shambles that has resulted from your Local Plan has plunged us into a planning policy void, the catastrophic results of which threaten to do untold damage to many of our beautiful villages through unplanned, unwanted and undesirable development.

Despite the commitment of our dedicated, but severely over stretched, New Communities Team this has simply thrown open the doors to exactly the sort of developer exploitation that a Local Plan should protect us from.

And on the subject of planning we come to Northstowe, which was originally visualised as setting new national standards for green eco towns and which now looks like being very far from the Jewel In the Crown of South Cambridgeshire that it could so easily have been.

When the funding for the secondary school is described as 'adequate but not generous' and the 20% affordable housing in Phase 2 may not even be that in Phase 3 one fears for the quality of life of its residents.

The ultimate test of its success is - would you live there? Would you want your children to live there? Is it going to be something that we are proud of or which fills us with shame? The choice lies with you.

And finally the City Deal which could well win prizes for its lack of democratic rigour. After the first meeting of the Board, the people rose up en masse to appeal in the most reasonable terms for the inclusion of rural cycle ways but were ignored. Over 100 businesses added their voices and they too were ignored. Let's hope that these are merely teething problems and that the Deal, should it survive this side of the

election, will deliver what people in South Cambridgeshire want and not just what a very small number of politicians think that they want.

Since Scrutiny in South Cambridgeshire District Council continues on its downward spiral into ineffectualness we shall be your critical friend and we hope that you will welcome this though it does require cooperation and communication which have been in short supply of late.

We shall continue to speak truth to power no matter how uncomfortable it makes you feel and to ask difficult questions regardless of how angry you get.

We shall continue, as their employers, to involve ourselves in the welfare of all of our officers despite this being an unpopular stance to take.

We shall continue to give a voice to those people who find our bureaucracy impenetrable and to question the need to make cuts over and above quality of services.

We shall continue to treat officers, each other and you with respect and courtesy regardless of any fundamental differences between us.

We may now be slightly smaller in number but we remain big in heart and voice and we shall continue to be brave and fearless in opposition and to represent the welfare of all residents of South Cambridgeshire to the very best of our ability and to uphold our shared aspiration that South Cambridgeshire is the best place to live in Britain.