

## **Longstanton Parish Council** **District Council Report 2014 / 2015**

Not surprisingly, this past year has been dominated by Northstowe-related activity. Before I deal with that I will cover a couple of other items.

The long-overdue A14 upgrade looks as if it is going ahead and work should start next year with a projected completion in 2020. Regrettably, while the upgrade is taking place the present traffic problems will get even worse as a result of restricted capacity. Also, because of the overriding priority of cost-cutting, the Bar Hill roundabout is only being designed to handle Northstowe Phase 1. So when Phase 2 begins we will need another A14-related upgrade, almost immediately. Can you believe it?

On the afternoon of Friday the 8<sup>th</sup> of August the village was subjected to a quite extraordinary downpour. The figure being quoted for the rainfall was 100mm (4 inches) falling in around 30 minutes. We have got rather blasé about “1 in 100 year storms” because they seem to occur quite regularly, but this storm greatly exceeded anything within living memory. The huge volume of storm water was prevented from passing through the culvert under School Lane by the post-harvest straw on the local fields and though there was some flooding lower down in the village, the majority of damage was caused to houses in Stokes Close. A well-attended public meeting was held in December to examine how to alleviate the village’s liability to flooding. The conclusion of the experts at that meeting was that nothing could realistically be done at present, but that the very large balancing ponds which are due to be built as part of Northstowe Phase 1 will dramatically reduce the village’s future vulnerability. I understand that this will be precious little comfort to those whose homes were flooded but I would point out that Bar Hill and Oakington were also badly flooded that afternoon. There are currently no plans at all to alleviate Bar Hill’s problem. Oakington is due to have similar large balancing ponds built, but not until a later phase of Northstowe.

I’d like to start my section on Northstowe by saying how much I have enjoyed working with the current Parish Council under Gill Ashby, and also with our new County Councillor, Pete Hudson. We have worked together as a team on a variety of topics, but principally on Northstowe. Pete and I are both members of the Northstowe Joint Development and Control Committee, and Gill has taken part in nearly all the Northstowe meetings. Consequently, Longstanton is at last receiving the Northstowe representation it requires.

Starting in January, a Northstowe Community Forum has started meeting every 3 months here in the Village Institute. The first meeting had over 100 members of the public attending, and attendance was considerably boosted because every house in the village had been leafleted. We had a second meeting last week which received very little publicity. These are public meetings and are the one chance that local people get to ask their Northstowe-related questions of elected members, planning officers and developers. The next two meetings will be on 15 July and 7 October, 7 – 9pm.

We now have a Community Engagement Officer for Northstowe, [Hilary.Cox@scamb.gov.uk](mailto:Hilary.Cox@scamb.gov.uk). Hilary is a useful contact and will be here at the Village Institute every Thursday from 12.30 to 2.30 if you wish to discuss any Northstowe-related matter.

I will deal with Northstowe Phase 1 first. As you will have noticed, the work to widen the B1050 along the Northstowe stretch has started. This will require the B1050 to be closed some nights during the summer. The official diversion route will be via the A1123 and, I think, the A14 and A1096 to St Ives. As more details emerge I will keep you posted.

The current plan is for Phase 1 housing delivery to begin in late 2016 and for the Phase 1 Primary school to be operational from September 2016. In September 2013 first completions were due late 2014. A year ago they were due late 2015. A slippage of 2 years in 20 months!

Those living close to the Phase 1 site have recently been subject to a lot of noise and dust pollution. Our thanks are due to David Hallam for getting the developers to turn off their vehicles' reversing alarms. The permitted times for on-site work are:

Mon – Fri 8am – 6pm

Sat 8am – 1pm

The permitted hours for delivery and collection are Mon – Sat 7am – 7pm.

No activity is permitted on Sundays or Bank Holidays.

All HGV's accessing the Phase 1 site are required to come along the Longstanton bypass and turn south at the roundabout near the golf course entry. They are NOT permitted to take a short cut through the village. The site agent's name is Jason Gibson. His mobile number is 07791 214 523. If you become aware of activity being carried on outside these permitted hours, or of Northstowe lorries driving through the village, let him know.

As part of the Northstowe committee's promotion of high standards, we imposed a minimum room-size condition on the Phase 1 development. Gallagher, who have always expressed eternal commitment to ensuring that Northstowe should be of the highest quality, showed their true colours by filing a planning application objecting to this condition. For no good reason officers decided that the Northstowe committee should not determine this application within the allotted time, as a result of which Gallagher immediately appealed on the grounds of non-determination. The planning inspector recently allowed this appeal. So we now have the dispiriting situation in which Phase 1 could consist of "shoebox homes", with the only dwellings with rooms of a decent size being the affordable homes, for which minimum standards will still apply.

Now for Phase 2. The Phase 2 application was eventually lodged at the very end of August 2014. A consultation process on Phase 2 was due to complete at the end of October. For reasons that beggar belief, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), who are the promoters of Phase 2, were not prepared to turn up to any of the meetings that were organised during the consultation process. I managed to beat the table hard enough to get them to organise a consultation meeting here for local residents on 1 November. Not only did they turn up but they leafleted the entire village, ensuring an excellent turn-out.

This huge application, for 3,500 homes, the Town Centre and a major new road, was due to be determined in December 2015. In December 2014 the Treasury decided that they wanted it to be determined in March instead. It is not easy to make sense of this decision, because no development can begin until the A14 upgrade is complete, which will not be until after 2020. As a result we met on March 25 to hear the application which was clearly simply not ready to go to committee. The meeting did not start till 2pm and we did not finish listening to representations until 7.40 pm. We would presumably have needed another 4 hours or so of discussion and the chairman decided to stop the meeting before that began. It was all a terrible mess.

The decision has been made to defer this meeting until 29 July. I trust that the HCA will use these four months to address the various aspects of this application which are inadequate. For example, it is 4Ha (that's 10 acres) short on sports areas. There is still no burial ground (which would mean that the 5,000 homes in Phases 1 and 2 would fill up our own burial ground very quickly indeed). It is proving very difficult to get any information about a proposed Town Park or about the precise separation arrangements that will be in place for Rampton Drift.

It is too early to become completely despondent about how Northstowe will work out but so far the reality is falling well short of what we had always been led to expect.

In conclusion, may I remind you all that I have an email list of local residents containing some 600 names. I use it to send out informative emails but it is also there to alert local residents to forthcoming events. If you want to join the list or to publicise an event, just email me and ask!

Alex Riley 27 April 2015