

District Council Update

The election for District Councillors takes place on 7th May. After four years, representing Priory Ward, I have decided not to seek re-election, as I am no longer able to devote the necessary time to the role and feel that the time is right for someone else to bring a fresh approach to job.

I stood for election on three main issues: Affordable Housing, Environment & Employment and Planning & Landscape. Whilst there is still much more work to be done, progress has been made.

Affordable Housing: Government funding for affordable homes has largely dried up and new development has had to be funded by other means. A grant from The Big Society Fund helped Homes for Wells, provide eleven affordable dwellings at the former Field Study Centre. Fifty five affordable dwellings (40 for letting, 15 for shared equity purchase) will be provided on the Hopkins Homes, Two Furlong Hill development, through a Section 106 Agreement. It is proposed to build fourteen affordable dwellings, at Priory Close, in Binham, on former Council land, utilising a Council loan to Broadland Housing. A large number of derelict or unused properties have been targeted by the Enforcement Board and brought back into use.

Environment & Employment: The Council is committed to maintaining the quality of the habitat of the many special designated areas in the District. The waste collection contract has been extended to take additional waste for recycling. Recreation & Tourism remains by far the biggest creator of wealth and employment in the District. Most visitors come to enjoy the unspoilt nature of the AONB and the Heritage Coastline. The coastal zone is under extreme pressure and several pieces of legislation have been introduced to protect it whilst maintaining or enhancing access to the public and giving local people a greater say in decision making: Coastal Access Act, East Marine Plan, and Localism Act. Currently the Council is part funding the Tourist information Centre, in the Maltings, and grants have been awarded, from the Big Society Fund for the regeneration of the Sackhouse for employment units. The Council are investing in the creation of employment hub, for the offshore wind energy industry, at Egmere.

Planning & Landscape: New development must be compatible with the needs of the community and appropriate to the landscape setting and local people must be involved in the decision making process. Town and Parish Councils have come to feel that their views have not always been given sufficient consideration on planning matters. The District Council is trying to engage with local councils, through seminars and workshops, to improve understanding of the planning system and provide better feedback on decisions. Many of the major developments, over the last four years, have been controversial, enhancing the

perception than planning decisions do not address local concerns. However, recently there has been greater dialogue between all authorities, at the consultation stage, and the whole planning regime is undergoing review.

Many challenges remain, such as balancing the requirements to reduce carbon emissions, by encouraging the development of wind turbines and solar farms, against the loss of agricultural land and visual impact on the landscape. Addressing the problems caused by increased traffic movements and demand for parking requires difficult decisions in our market and resort towns. The December 2013 tidal surge has emphasised the vulnerability of our coastal settlements to future surge events which are likely to become more frequent. The seafront at Wells is particularly vulnerable and it will need a community effort to persuade the flood risk authorities to invest in better flood defences. More derelict land and unused properties need to be brought back into use.

I have enjoyed a good working relationship with officers and members of the District Council, although it was, at times, very frustrating, as an Independent, not to be able to have greater influence on Council decisions. Currently the Council uses the Cabinet System of governance, but this is under review, and it is my hope that in future there will be greater inclusion of ordinary Council Members in decision making. I have valued the experience of working with, fellow District Councillor: Jonathan Savory, County Councillor: Marie Strong and the clerk and members of Wells Town Council, and the clerks and members of the six parish Councils in Priory Ward.

ONGOING WELLS ISSUES TO TRACK

ENFORCEMENT:

CLARENCE HOUSE: Planning application received. The amended scheme, as part of the application, is out to consultation • The Improvement notice automatically passes onto new owners.

MARYLAND INDUSTRIAL ESTATE: Informal discussions have taken place with the owner.

OLD GRAIN STORE: A planning application was submitted for this site, but has been withdrawn.

GIFTS GALORE SITE: This site is now under consideration by the Enforcement Board. 18 February 2015 • Action: Planning to provide an update.

CO-OP RETAIL STORE, POLKA RD, WELLS: Re conditions 6&7 of planning consent: to establish local supply chains and promote businesses, in and around Wells. The Council's enforcement Officer is investigating.

MAJOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS:

PF/11/0087: Conversion of sub-station to A1 (retail shop) and construction of replacement sub-station | 71-73 Staithe Street, Wells-next-the-sea, NR23 1AN. There was a significant tripping point regarding a 19992 Deed of Access which resulted in the project as it was being shelved. Instead, there is consideration being given in respect of three parking spaces together with moving the sub-station and developing the shop in such a way to avoid the 92 Deed.

PF/12/1228: Proposed Filling Station, Kiosk and Residential Flat, Polka Rd, Wells: No further information.

PF/10/0484: Formation of public vehicle park with associated pedestrian and vehicular accesses and landscaping | Land to North of Freeman Street, Wells-next-the-Sea: Reported to be going ahead.

PF/13/0007 | Erection of 123 dwellings with public park and open space and associated landscaping, drainage and highway infrastructure | Land off Two Furlong Hill and Market Lane, Wells-next-the-Sea: Burnt Street/Church road improvements outstanding. Affordable Housing condition: No more than 24 market Housing Dwellings shall be sold or occupied until 10 of the rented dwellings practically complete and transferred to a registered provider.

COUNCIL ASSETS:

LAND OFF EAST QUAY ROAD, WELLS, ADJACENT TO "SHIPWRIGHTS" (DRYING GROUNDS): Parking on land, to which The Council's has title, is at the sufferance of The Council. There is a "Charge" on the Council land stating that there is a right of way, over the land by the Crown Estate and all others authorised by the Estate. No attempt has been made, by The Council, to restrict access on to the land to which it has title.

BEACH ROAD TOILETS: Funds have been allocated from the 2015/16 Budget to commission a study to consider the commercial development opportunities for generating income and a return for the Council from Wells Public Convenience site.

OTHER:

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS: The **local planning authority** is obliged by law to help people draw up their neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood plans are a way for communities to decide the future of the places where they live and work.

They will be able to:

- Choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built.
- Have their say on what those new buildings should look like
- Grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead.

Tidal Surge, December 2013: There is no funding available to improve the community, flood defences along Wells seafront. It is the responsibility of individuals to protect their properties against future flooding; funding is available through Repair & Renew grants but the deadline for applications is 31st May. Unfortunately, there are still a number of properties without any flood protection. There is a one in twenty year chance of flooding along the seafront.

Coastal Concordat: All planning applications for development between mean high water and mean low water are now subject to the Concordat and full consultation with stakeholders must take place.