

## **County Councillor's Report to Waterbeach Annual Parish Meeting 26/5/16**

For my report this year I thought I would mention three very different topics.

Railway Station Parking. Work is progressing and is on course for the new Cambridge North station to open in May next year. When it opens it will have 450 car parking spaces in addition to spaces for 1,000 bicycles. It is anticipated that the London trains which currently terminate at Cambridge will terminate at Cambridge North when the station is open. It is too early to say exactly how this will affect parking at Waterbeach station, but nobody is going to be willing to invest in extra parking at Waterbeach while there is a chance that motorists will opt for the more frequent services available at Cambridge North, nor until there is much more clarity about whether the Waterbeach station itself will move as a result of the proposed development on the former barracks and the farmland to the east of it.

County Council Budget. For several years the County Council's budget has been "capped". This means that the total the County Council was allowed to spend was limited by the Government. So the County Council could only decide how to apportion that total across different services – if it wanted to spend more on one thing, it had to spend less on something else. This year, at a marathon 12-hour meeting, the council has broken new ground by deciding to set a budget below the capping limit. Although we are nearly two months into the new financial year it is still unclear quite how the council will manage to balance the books – with the detail of the cuts to road gritting and community transport, for example, not yet finally decided. While I expect that it will be the reductions in highways maintenance and road gritting that will be most noticeable to the majority of people, I fear that it will be cuts to personal care for older people and services for vulnerable children and their families that will have the greatest impact.

Devolution. Perhaps the most topical issue for Cambridgeshire local councils at the moment is devolution. This is the proposal that some of the things that the Government does at present could be decided upon closer to the people they affect. For over a year the Government have been talking to local councils in Norfolk and Suffolk about their idea for a combined authority for the two counties, with an elected mayor. This does seem a bit top-heavy to many people when there are already county, district and parish councils. To nearly everyone's surprise there was an announcement in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget that this devolution deal was to include, in a single combined authority with a single elected mayor, not just Norfolk and Suffolk but also Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. No twelve months of discussion for us ! To say that this has not gone down very well would be an understatement. Cambridge City Council has said that it doesn't want anything to do with it. The County Council voted nearly unanimously to say that it was unacceptable. Many councillors in Norfolk and Suffolk are also unhappy with the current proposal. It is not at all clear where this will all lead. One suggestion is that there should be two combined authorities, one for Norfolk and Suffolk and another for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with two mayors. Many people do not like the idea of elected mayors and the extra layers of local governance that they imply – suggesting that if it is decided to go down that route one layer of councils, counties or districts, should be abolished altogether. Oh, and they are hoping to have it agreed by the end of the month ! We shall have to wait and see.

Maurice Leeke