

# **Cornwall Council report**

## **Cllr Dick Cole**

Time period: 27th October to 22nd November 2015

### **1. Council meetings**

I have attended a range of formal meetings over the last month, many of which related to planning matters. These included: Cabinet, Strategic Planning Committee, an informal Planning and Development Improvement Board, and a briefing on the proposal for a so-called "eco-community" near St Austell. There were also two formal meetings of the Planning Policy Advisory Committee, the second of which considered the latest draft of the Cornwall Local Plan. I also took the lead in three meetings / pre-agenda / preparatory sessions about progress towards the preparation of a Local Plan for Cornwall (through my chairmanship of the Planning PAC).

In addition to the formal meetings listed above, I have had numerous meetings with council officers and others to discuss a range of issues.

### **2. Penare Pig Farm, Higher Fraddon and associated AD plant**

#### **- Strategic Planning Committee**

The three planning applications for Penare were presented to the Strategic Planning Committee on 19th November, with the officers recommending approval for all three applications.

The debate took over four hours, and I was really impressed with the thorough scrutiny given to the applications by the members of the Committee.

Local people speaking at the meeting included Mel Morcom, Helen Martin, Sam Williams, Bella McCarthy, Anne Woolcock and Jozsef Varga. All did extremely well. Michael Hopkins represented the Parish Council and spoke authoritatively on all three applications, while Dan Johns was also there for the pig farm.

The first application relating to the pig farm was passed. Councillors voted – in principle – by 14 votes to four to consent the (retrospective) development of the pig farm with additional and stronger conditions. The planning officers were given delegated authority to finalise the conditions – in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the Committee, plus me. However, it was also agreed that if I was not happy with the conditions, I could refer the application back to the Committee.

The members of the Committee did listen to local residents and agreed that conditions should ensure bio-filter (or equivalent) odour treatment be inserted into all the livestock buildings. It was also agreed that the construction of the two new buildings they wanted could not commence until all existing buildings had been retrofitted with odour control.

Members also felt that the large livestock lorry, which had caused all manner of problems, should no longer go the farm and instead be replaced by a couple of smaller lorries. The farm manager had told me prior to the meeting that he was already investigating this and it should happen.

It was a different story with the biogas plant. Members of the Planning Committee seemed to universally share the concerns of local residents about how the plant had developed through the non-material amendments and expressed concern at the impact of the traffic, etc. Many were extremely angry at what had transpired, with a number speaking about the public meeting a few weeks back and their own visits to the lane.

The biogas applications were deferred so that the Council could make the case for an access off the A30 with Highways England, with the MP and other interested parties. No members spoke in favour of the applications and a number spoke strongly about refusing the application.

If no agreement can be reached with regard to the A30, it was clear that the councillors will look to refuse the application when it is brought back to the Committee. I cannot remember a meeting when councillors were so united against a proposal.

#### **- Letter to Highways England**

I spoke to Ann Double, who was at the meeting on behalf of her husband Steve Double MP, and they have already written to the Roads Minister Andrew Jones MP seeking a high-level meeting to discuss access off the A30.

#### **- Higher Fraddon Community Forum**

Because of the imminent meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee, there have been no meetings of the Higher Fraddon Community Forum since 2nd September. I will now be looking into reconvening the Forum in the near future.

### **3. Application for wind turbines on Pines Tip**

The planning application for three wind turbines on Pines Tip was also due to be heard by the Strategic Planning Committee on 19th November. The published report recommended that the application be refused and gave two reasons. These were (i) the lack of local support, which did not meet the test set out in the latest Ministerial Statement, and (ii) cumulative landscape impact.

The application was pulled from the agenda because the applicant stated that they wished to submit further information to address the concerns of the planning officers. Legal advice was sought and this stated that it would be premature to make a decision on the application.

The case officer has told me that he anticipates the application will probably be heard in February.

#### **4. Cornwall Local Plan**

I also chaired the latest (four-hour) meeting of the Planning Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) at Cornwall Council on 17th November.

The one item on the agenda was the latest version of the Cornwall Local Plan, which has been redrafted following the first stage of the Examination in Public who took place in May.

As a result of the Examination, the government inspector instructed the Council to make a series of changes to make the document "sound," and therefore adoptable. This included increasing Cornwall's housing target for the period 2010-2030.

Officers presented a new FOAN (Full Objectively Assessed Need) for Cornwall's so-called housing needs, which followed guidance set in place by central government and his appointed Inspector.

The new target is 52,500 new properties for the plan period, which was accepted by those councillors at the meeting because they struggled to envisage how a lower figure could be acceptable to the Inspector. They were also fully aware that David Cameron had recently told councils that, if a local plan was not in place by 2017, the government would step in and take control of the process away from local councillors and impose [an even worse] plan.

There was also much discussion around other aspects of the revised Local Plan, particularly affordable housing and the distribution of housing development around Cornwall.

The proposed housing target for the China Clay Area for the period 2010-2030 is 1,800 properties, though the actual target for St Enoder has yet to be finalised.

The China Clay Area is also expected to accommodate a so-called "eco-community" of an additional 1,200 properties by 2030, making the overall target 3,000 new housing units. [The proposal is for 1,500 properties, but it is estimated that only 1,200 would be completed by 2030.

At the PAC meeting, I made the following points:

- An "eco-community" proposal had been included in the Cornwall Local Plan because central government had included a St Austell "eco-town" in a Planning Policy Statement. But since the PPS has recently been withdrawn, councillors could legitimately reconsider whether the allocation was appropriate.

- If the level of housing proposed for the China Clay Area (including eco-community) was allowed to go forward, it would mean that the housing stock of Clay Country would increase by 87% over four decades (from 1991 to 2030).
- The "live" application for a 1,500 unit eco-community does not have local support. It has been opposed by over 1,000 representations, two local parish councils and St Austell Town Council.
- Last month, the China Clay Community Network Area had written to Cornwall Council seeking that the unitary authority withdraws its backing for the "eco-community."

A number of councillors spoke in favour of the "eco-community", while others argued that they did not want to change the "distribution" at this "late stage" or high housing growth in Clay Country was not enough to justify cancelling the development.

I nonetheless proposed that the "eco-community" allocation be removed from the document, and the housing reallocated to other parts of Cornwall. This was seconded by independent councillor Gary King from St Austell, but I was extremely disappointed that the proposal was defeated by six votes to two.

The unitary authority's Cabinet will consider the Local Plan on 3rd December, followed by the Full Council on 15th December.

## **5. Leisure centres and libraries**

I also attended a meetings of the Cabinet to raise my concerns about the plans brought forward by the ruling administration of the unitary authority to shift council leisure centres and related facilities to the private sector, and pass one-stop shops and libraries to parish councils and community groups – neither of which I support.

But I do have enormous sympathy for the councillors on the Cabinet who have brought forward these proposals – which they themselves would prefer not to have to implement – because such proposals are a direct consequence of central government's deep cuts.

In terms of the leisure centres, these are presently run for the Council via a contract with Tempest, but the new proposal could include the transfer of the freehold of the leisure centres to private providers. I was among a number of councillors who argued that, in whatever future arrangement was agreed, the freehold should be retained by the Council giving them greater control over service provision.

The Cabinet agreed that "freehold retention" would be an option going forward, though it is still unclear how this will pan out.

## **6. Lottery application**

I am disappointed to report that my stage 1 application to the Big Lottery, for funding towards new play equipment in the Indian Queens Recreation Ground, has been unsuccessful.

I am not surprised at the decision. It is much harder to achieve funding from the Lottery than in the past, as I explained verbally at a recent meeting.

The response stated that the application for our project was "not strong enough" for us to be offered funding. It added:

"Reaching Communities projects which include this type of capital funding must be combined with a project to run activities from the resulting facility to address the needs of the wider community. This project was solely to replace and refurbish a community play facility."

The letter also questioned "what issues, needs and disadvantages existed in beneficiaries in Indian Queens which the new play facility would address" – which I would challenge – and they made it clear that if we were to send "another application for the same project again, our experience suggests it is unlikely to be successful."

At Tuesday's meeting, I will put forward a revised proposal for how we fund the renovation of the play area.

## **7. Inquiries**

During the last month, I have been involved with a range of local initiatives and I have also helped numerous people and local organisations with advice and guidance on a wide range of issues.