**ANNUAL REPORT TO SOUTH CAMBS EXECUTIVE FROM SOUTH CAMBS DISTRICT COUNCIL GROUP.**

This has been a year that has been categorised by major issues and changes to the way we will be working in future.

**The Local Plan** has been wending its way slowly through the process having been suspended by the inspector who required additional evidence on the support for the Green Belt amongst other things. This, together with the district not having a 5 year housing land supply, has meant that we have seen a horrendous rise in speculative planning applications affecting many of our wards. Most significantly, Melbourn lost an appeal and has been forced to take 200 new houses on a green field site despite the most impressive of campaigns from its Lib Dem councillors and the parish council. The upshot of this is that the planning committee are going to be forced to be much tougher when considering what are now referred to as ‘5 year housing land supply applications’. Additionally we have been fighting to stop an extension to the bio medical campus which will impact significantly on the small 9 Wells Nature reserve and most critically sits firmly in the greenbelt. The South Cambs group are unequivocally against the release of any further greenbelt land. This is in line with our national policy. A further battle is being fought by Cllr Hawkins against the proposed expansion to the Bourne Airfield development which is creeping ever nearer to Caldecott and other villages.

**The Boundary Commission** has now finalised the new plan for South Cambs which sees a 20% reduction in councillor numbers. It looks as though the Tories are going to be harder hit than we are due to a number of their wards disappearing but it is going to be tough for all of us to maintain and hopefully increase our holdings now that we represent 20% more people.

**The City Deal** has been a fiasco in so many ways and has managed to turn a enormous opportunity into a pubic relations car crash. The governance is a disaster all of its own as has been exemplified by the 5 resignations in a year from the 5 member Board. We have ensured that we are part of the Local Liaison Forums as well as having Bridget on the Assembly and are now being routinely asked for comment from the press. Bridget recently took part in a Cambridge 105 Question Time with fellow City Deal members Cllrs Burkitt and Lewis Herbert. Our place on the Assembly has given us the opportunity to make things better. This includes ensuring that the 1000 affordable homes which are part of the deal all remain as affordable homes rather than the fudge of the figures which was recently being sneaked through and which involved all market and affordable homes on what are now called ‘Non Local Plan Sites’ being counted. We are also responsible for the Call for Evidence which allows local people, experts and interested parties to input their own ideas and schemes into the process. Most recently Bridget has managed to get a segregated super cycleway along the A428 corridor included in the plan.

**Devolution.** We have continued our opposition to the proposed devolution deal and in particular the elected Mayor. The new leader of South Cambs, Cllr Topping, is a great proponent of the devo deal so it is a forlorn hope that it will be rejected but we will continue to oppose it. The cost of the mayor’s office is considerable and is likely to be levied directly against the taxpayer but more importantly it is a serious threat to the democratic process and the influence of those of us in opposition groups.

**South Camb’s** CEO Jean Hunter resigned suddenly - not long after Cllr Topping took over. We have an internal acting CEO now and are recruiting a new one. The option of a shared CEO was rejected.

**Shared Services** The council has moved into more and more shared services, most recently IT, Building Control and Legal. On the whole it has been a great disappointment in that little money has been saved and the service has diminished, especially in relation to internal service provision. The main driver is ‘resilience’ due to the difficulties we have in recruitment.

**Planning Service** Our planning service was bordering on going into special measures. We have now reduced the number of active planning applications from over 900 to under 300 and are finally meeting our performance targets for most things. We are still far too reliant on agency staff though.