

And finally ... my footnotes from my 2014/15 monthly reports

April 2014

And finally ... it occurs to me that life is strangely asymmetric sometimes. My son-in-law goes to get his eyes checked for a repeat contact lens prescription and is told that it's OK. But shortly after he has an eye test with a view to buying spectacles and is told he needs a stronger prescription. The former of course simply addressed the need to change, the latter was absolute. Then when we look at new road schemes the new one must pass a safety audit. If it doesn't it doesn't proceed no matter how dangerous the current situation is. And with respect to the Bishop's planning application the developer could of course complain of non-determination if the council fails to consider its application in due time. However it's now been referred to the 'design panel' but the developer's said it's not ready to present. Surely Histon & Impington Parish Council should now be able to complain that now it's the developer which is holding up the process ...

May 2014

And finally ... I've just taken a short break in Plymouth. I wanted to experience the train journey now that the track south of Exeter has been repaired. I was truly impressed by the speed at which that was done. Plymouth itself of course is famous for the Hoe onto which several fine late 19th century buildings front. But the planners lost control so check out the 1960s buildings at the west end. There's a photo on my blog post <http://bit.ly/1hphHFk> and more photos at <http://bit.ly/1m3z7Dk>.

June 2014

And finally ... along with food and shelter those of us with high speed broadband take it for granted these days and then when it's not available we wonder how on earth we are going to survive. It wasn't quite that bad for me but I lost my upstairs broadband last week. I noted that the lights on a 'powerline adapter' were not blinking so figured that maybe I needed a new one. I've used CPC Farnell (<http://cpc.farnell.com/>) as an online supplier for such stuff and I called. I can recommend them. They are responsive and patient and seem to give good advice. I ordered my replacement on Wednesday and on Friday, thanks to 'plug and play', I was up and running again. And this is not my first experience of CPC. Check them out. They are the acceptable face of on-line retailing!

July 2014

And finally ... I was in Yorkshire in the middle of the month helping my daughter and son-in-law to move house to Wetherby. That seems a pleasant place to live and I was impressed by the continuing evidence of the Tour de France. The bunting is still out and there are score of yellow bicycles along the route. I know that Leeds paid big money to attract the Tour but it also seems to have invested in it in a big way. By contrast it was all rather low key in Cambridge. It was a good day, thank goodness the sun shone, but I was really surprised how easy it was to get a good vantage point to watch the race and then that there was no difficulty in finding a place for lunch straight afterwards. I know we had a commitment not to spend any money but when you think that it was a once in a life time opportunity maybe we should have done a little more. All we had were a 100 or so lamp post banners which have since been sold off at £40 each.

August 2014

And finally ... I've had an emotionally rather draining month. A good friend of 55 years has been suffering from cancer and I visited him early in the month. Mid-month he died and last Friday was

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the funeral. It makes you reflect on your own mortality, appreciate your good fortune and commit to getting on and making the most of your life. I was asked to give the eulogy at the funeral and that made me dig deeper into our friendship than I might have done otherwise and it was an illuminating experience. During the process I came across a quote attributed to him to explain why he'd done something specific: 'because I made a promise to a child'. It's pretty powerful to think that a promise to a child is of particular importance.

September 2014

And finally ... it seems that emotional months are the rule for me this year and levels were ratcheted up again towards the end of the month when I put number 1 son on a plane for Perth, Australia where he's taking a position with the police. Mid-month I took a couple of days out and we went to Oxford together. I have to admit that I've always gone along with dismissing it as 'the other place' and because it's a bigger city with more industry it is in some way less charming. Fact it it's not better or worse it's just different with lots of qualities. And if you want an equal attraction to Ely just outside the city Blenheim is truly magnificent as well. Go to <http://bit.ly/1udyNtw> for a narrative.

October 2014

And finally ... charging for parking at Cambridge's P&R sites has recently been implemented. It's not gone smoothly. Not only are people parking outside the sites to avoid the charge but those who do pay it point out that it's complicated. This has resulted in queues at ticket machines and, as a result, travellers missing their buses. It's a project that's been badly managed from the start (check out <http://bit.ly/1dcGTZj>) and now CCC has invested in eight more ticket machines (were they included in the project economics?) to improve matters. It's even seen it appropriate to make a video to show people how to use the machines which surely misses the point. This should be a very, very simple transaction why is it made so complicated? Automatic Number Plate Recognition may be snazzy technology but is it really appropriate? There's a concept in the digital world called the UX, the User Experience, and the basic premise is that person/machine interactions should be simple/intuitive and as short/quick as possible. Did CCC consider the UX when it decided how to implement charging at the P&R sites? As it extends this to the Guided Bus it needs to think this though very carefully. And by the way next time it does a video can it not film the main speaker standing with the light behind him? Go to <http://bit.ly/10cppdN> for the press release and link to the video.

November 2014

And finally ... I had a week's holiday during the month (go to <http://bit.ly/1z5bz94> for that story) when I went to Turkey, Cappadocia to be specific. Truly memorable. Turkey is of course a country at several crossroads: in or out of Europe, secular or Islamic, developing or developed. I've been several times, often on business, and have always been impressed with the people that I've met. It's an enormous country with lots of natural resources and its Mediterranean coast is blessed with a good climate. The country's leaders have a real challenge to get their policies right for the future so that its people can share in the wealth which it's starting to acquire. I'm reminded about the change in Spain. In Franco's pre-EU times Spain was a cheap holiday destination. Now it's a proud and (reasonably) prosperous nation. You see its nationals enjoying their own country. I trust that the same will be true for Turkey. I've posted some photos on Flickr at <http://bit.ly/1uZpLfz>.

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December 2014

And finally ... I'm becoming increasingly frustrated with the quality of the papers being considered by the Council's committees. It didn't seem to matter that much when they went to the Cabinet which most councillors weren't a part of but now that we are all committee members they are important. The papers we get a long, formulaic and turgid. But more important they often miss the point. And don't ever think about reading an 'executive summary'. It's true of course that if officers had more time they could write shorter reports. Good prose is concise but you do have to work at it. But what we get is a standard format, it hasn't changed since I've been a councillor, there's lots of boiler plate and the substance and rationale for the recommendation are generally hidden. The item at the Health Committee to which I referred above was typical. It completely missed the point. If we were to agree to spend money we should at least have been told what we would spend it on and what benefits would accrue!

January 2015

And finally ... everyone I've met since the turn of the year seems to be ill, has been ill or has a close member of the family in a similar situation. I'm sure it's no different to any other year and thankfully none of my contacts have been seriously ill but it does get you thinking. There's been no flu epidemic as such so the flu jobs that some of us have had don't seem to have been material but most people refer to 'a virus'. And of course when you got to the doctor he/she generally reaches the same prognosis and says something like 'be patient, it'll pass'. Well I am being patient. I felt rough a week ago and haven't really gotten ill but I'm a week in now and I still feel a bit rough. Not bad enough to not work (or to write this report) but not 100% either. More patience needed!

February 2015

And finally ... I grew up with cricket. My father had a passion for it and he passed it on to me. And so of course I'm following the world cup and today I've been fascinated by the news of Afghanistan beating Scotland. It's incredible that a war torn country like Afghanistan which none of us would ever have thought of as a cricketing nation should suddenly emerge as an, albeit second division, contender. Where on earth do they play? Is there a league? How do they find their good players? There really are too many questions but it's an amazing story.

March 2015

And finally ... I did enjoy a 3 week break and was able to check out the life that my son is carving out for himself in Australia. It's a super country and if in general it's laid back he's got himself based in Fremantle which is just about horizontal. It is a blessed country and in Western Australia the government is flush with mining royalties with the result that roads are maintained, the police is fully funded, schools are in good shape and there's excellent public transport. And the sun shines and there's good food and wine. It's just not fair! I've posted a few photos at <http://bit.ly/1lvohIK>.