

And finally ... my footnotes from my 2016/17 monthly reports

April 2016

And finally ... I tend to wear by European heart on my sleeve and I guess this dates back to the beginning of the 80s when I held European management jobs based, ironically, in Switzerland. It was a smaller EU in those days of course, there were still multiple currencies and I remember a sterling crisis being almost an annual event. I travelled a lot and was regularly in Italy and often this involved a very pleasant train journey through the Alps to Milan. Then it was an Italy with 2000 lire to the pound, a communist mayor in Naples, burdensome and petty bureaucracy and a general air of dilapidation. Those who lived in the north talked of the 3rd world beginning in Rome. It's all very different now of course. And it's not just the north that's smartened up. I've just come back from a week's holiday down in the deep south-east and the fabric of the country is in good shape. In every community there's a town hall or similar and three flags fly: the local one, the Italian one and the one of Europe. There's no embarrassment to being in the EU, I suspect many people recognise how much benefit it's brought, but I can't see any loss of national identity. Italy is still very Italian. I feel that our problem has always been that we've never really committed, we've never taken from the EU as much as Italy has for example, and we've never exerted enough influence over its development.

There's post from my holiday at <http://bit.ly/1TBLR7b> and photos at <https://flic.kr/s/aHskxRBfPh>.

May 2016

And finally ... I've gained a little useful experience this month. It's always said you develop empathy by 'walking in someone's shoes' and I did so because I fell off my bike (!) and went for a week or so with significant back pain and bad sleeping. It's largely cleared up now but it did make me think. Back pain is said to be debilitating and I can believe it. Every move is made with caution and getting into a comfortable position to sleep is just impossible.

June 2016

And finally ... I guess the big news items of the month have been the referendum nationally and devolution locally but there have been a couple of good news developments to make everyone smile. The first was the story of Marcus Willis (made even better by hearing that he's turned down £15K from the Sun). The second of course was Wales' victory over Belgium in the European Nations Cup. It was good to see how Gareth Bale doesn't just star. He also lifts the rest of the team.

July 2016

And finally ... you'll note my comments above regarding the A&ICom and Wisbech Castle. It's a bit of a misnomer because what's there now is an interesting but unspectacular Regency family home built just 150 years ago. However there's centuries of history beforehand, the interior is in fine condition and there's a splendid garden. However what makes it special is its context. Wisbech Castle sits in the middle of The Crescent which is barely 200m from the centre of Wisbech and such a contrast is difficult to imagine. The Crescent is in fact a circus of rather fine Georgian Houses and when we visited the other day they were all resplendent with hanging baskets. Wisbech Castle itself is a twin of Peckover House which is a National Trust property and also worth visiting.

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August 2016

And finally ... we seem to have had a good summer as far as August has been concerned and that's vindicated my policy of staying at home during this time of year. I'm of an age now of course when my children are off the payroll and I can take my vacations during school terms times when the weather's less good here. This year I was able to take advantage of the good weather in August because my son's been back home from Australia and we've been visiting and photographing places closer to home. We've had an excellent trip to Norwich and the Norfolk coast and we've spent time reminding ourselves of the historic connections of Cambridge. We visited some of its museums which are going to be essential amenities when we're visited by grandchildren.

September 2016

And finally ... I went along to the Cambridge Literary Festival event with Robert Harris (author of Fatherland, Enigma, Pompeii etc). He writes a good yarn but he's also got strong political opinions. One thing he said in this respect is that it's dangerous to mix political systems. He pointed out that our system is parliamentary. Such systems don't sit well with referenda. Furthermore our local government is based on councils not mayors and our systems of checks and balances and accountability relate to this. Why would we mix them? People complain that decisions don't get taken quickly in a council and they may be right but a decision taken quickly is not necessarily a good one. It's reported that 'business' is in favour of a mayor as a part of our devolution deal because he/she would make quick decisions. But since when did business decide our civic priorities?

October 2016

And finally ... the reaction of some parts of the media to the comments of Gary Lineker and Lily Allen about the fate of child migrants in Calais is strange. Suggesting that because you are privileged or have a bit of money you can't take a moral position doesn't seem right. Surely the opposite is true.

November 2016

And finally ... Fidel Castro's died. He's been off the world stage for some time of course but through the 60s and the rest of the 20th century he was a visible figure, in his/Cuba's standoff with the USA and as a fully paid up member of the 3rd world alliance. There's no doubt that the regime which he replaced was pretty evil but reports of the way that the subsequent Cuban regime dealt with its opponents also make grim reading so it's not clear whether he left a net positive or negative contribution. I spent a very pleasant holiday in Cuba about 10 years ago and remember the ever present combos and rum cocktails, the empty roads and wonderful 1950s American cars, and the generally dreadful food despite the opportunities presented by both land and sea. But at the same time I was aware of near 100% literacy and an exemplary health and adult social care system.

December 2016

And finally ... pundits are forever telling us that one of the problems with the UK is our low productivity. Evidently you can measure it and we compare poorly with the USA on the one hand and other countries in Europe on the other. I'm not sure if it's true in factories because I've seen some pretty impressive automated production lines but I can believe it when it comes to services. I despair at the inability of the average UK barista to multi-task and I'm sure that many of our professions are riddled with inefficiencies because of long entrenched practices. But there is another

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angle and that's the number of days that we work. Not so long ago those days between Xmas and New Year were working days, no more. That takes a percent or two out of our productive capacity.

January 2017

And finally ... I referred above to a Health Com report (<http://bit.ly/2kaoq8Y>) on health inequalities and the relationship between them and broader measures of deprivation. You've only got to look at these to understand what a heterogeneous county Cambridgeshire is. My Health Com work takes me to Wisbech and I see a community with a wonderful heritage but one which has suffered from lack of investment ([click here](#) for a recent view) and which is simply cut off with poor transport links. Contrast that with the optimism at the Cambridge Ahead (www.cambridgeahead.co.uk) conference and the planning application from the White Brasserie Company to convert the Boot in Histon (www.whitebrasserie.com). Such are the differences which have shaped recent election results.

February 2015

And finally ... I reaped the benefit of my multiple (well twofold) cultural connections this month. We've just been through Chinese New Year so I joined my wife's Tai Chi club's annual Chinese New Year dinner. This year it was at the Peking in Homerton Street. It's been around since the 1980s but it used to be in Burleigh Street and I suspect that it's too much off the beaten track now. It's not cheap so it won't get the student clientele but it is very good. And then just this week I went along to a St David's Day dinner at Jesus College. That was also an excellent meal with fine Welsh lamb and a super selection of Welsh cheeses at the end. Fortunately the wines were from Chile and France so very drinkable and put us in just the right spirit to at least pretend we were joining in a rendition of 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau' before we went home.

March 2015

And finally ... we're coming to the end of another municipal year and another council as we march into the election season. At last week's council meeting I reflected on the council's experience of operating 'in committee mode' for the last three years. The doom-mongers suggested that the council would grind to a halt and that the council would become a laughing stock. That's clearly not been the case and it's also clear that there has been more consensus politics and that's got to be good. There's also been much more engagement with all councillors involved in at least one decision making committee. I asked the Leader of the Council if he agreed with me. I think he said yes! We agreed however that it could still be better and fingers crossed we can work on that together in the new council.