

County Councillor Annual Report - Sawston & Shelford Division

(includes Sawston, Little and Great Shelfords, Stapleford, Babraham, South Trunton, Hauxton, Harston, Newton and Haslingfield)

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Introduction

2022 will be notable as the year of the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II on Thursday 8 September. The accession of HM King Charles III was proclaimed in Cambridge and Ely, and elsewhere in the county, two days later.

The composition of the County Council has changed since my last annual report following the death of Independent Chair of the Council Derek Giles who retired from that role as a result of his ill health, and another councillor switching parties. Cllr Doug Dew (Hemingfords & Fenstanton) left the Conservative Group in January 2023 and joined the Liberal Democrat Group. Cllr Geoff Seeff (Lib Dem) won the St Neots The Eatons seat in the by-election in February following Cllr Giles's death.

Conservatives	27
Liberal Democrats	22
Labour	9
Independents	3

1. Strategy & Resources

The high rates of inflation in the last year, and the turmoil of the Liz Truss /Kwasi Kwarteng mini budget, increased the costs of providing council services and therefore widened the budget gap.

The Council increased its portion of Council Tax in February, by 4.99 percent in total—2.99 per cent for general services, and two per cent for adult social care. The Conservative opposition proposed an increase of four per cent instead, plugging the council tax gap by using up one-off funding meant for environmental projects, care, and strengthening council services.

2. Adults & Health

National changes in health and care decision-making took place during the year, with the creation of local Integrated Care Systems spanning health and social care. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough created a joint Health & Wellbeing Board to replace the previous separate Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Boards.

This year has exposed the vulnerability of NHS services nationally and also locally. A BBC investigation last summer of dental provision in the UK revealed that no dental practice in Cambridgeshire was accepting new adult patients.

In addition to Covid, avian flu precautions were implemented across the UK during the year.

3. Children & Young People

Funding of vouchers over the school holidays for families eligible for free school meals has continued, as has the Holiday Activity & Food programme for the children of eligible families. The cost of living crisis has seen many Cambridgeshire families reliant on such schemes.

The Council was praised by Ofsted for the work of senior leaders in Children's Services in responding to the challenge of Covid, and for maintaining continuity during structural change. Most children in need and those with a child protection plan were supported well.

The council is still seeking residents who would like to make a difference to the life of a child or young person by becoming a foster carer.

In a piece of good news for Cambridgeshire, the council and the Government reached agreement on the 'safety valve' process to resolve the escalating deficit in the cost of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities education. The deficit was expected to grow to over £90m by 2025/26 if left unchecked, and the council was not permitted to divert funding from other sources to fill the gap. Cambridgeshire has been awarded £49M which will be used to create 463 new special school places, with a further £11.3M in capital funding to support new SEND provision on mainstream school sites. Cambridgeshire has historically received less funding per child for education than other areas.

4. COSMIC

COSMIC (Communities, Social Mobility & Inclusion Committee) has continued to oversee the Household Support Fund, which supports people experiencing immediate financial hardship to pay for food, household energy or other essential items. An increasing number of families are struggling financially at the moment.

COSMIC agreed to use some of the money from the fund to give a 'payment holiday' to pensioners in arrears with their water bills.

A Warm Hubs programme over the winter was funded by the NHS and administered by Cambridgeshire ACRE with fantastic support from local parishes.

A review of the mobile library service resulted in a number of improvements, including more stops, more fuel-efficient routes, and local storage of vehicles. Cambridgeshire's Library@home volunteers were one of three voluntary organisations in the county to be given the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service—the highest award a local voluntary group can receive in the UK.

The Government is introducing a requirement for photographic ID for voters at elections. This starts with the elections in May, and will cost up to £180M over ten years, despite cases of voter identity fraud at polling stations being almost non-existent.

Around two million voters in the UK do not have the right form of ID to enable them to vote—they can apply for free Voter Authority Certificates, but applications for these are extremely slow and many people are likely to find themselves deprived of their right to vote on 4 May. Cllr Dupre has been working with County Council officers on ways in which the council can support the effort to ensure the many people without the required photo ID apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate so that they are not denied their right to vote. I proposed a motion on this to the county council which was agreed.

5. Environment

The Council awarded the first spending from its Just Transition fund, including £2.175M for a business case for the first phase of the Council's plan for Cambridgeshire to reach Net Zero carbon by 2045. £1.75M was also awarded for flood work and nature restoration.

On the hottest day on record in the UK, Joint Administration members of the County Council voted to sign Zero Hour's Nature & Climate Declaration, while the tarmac melted in the council car park outside the building.

The County Council is working with district councils on energy retrofits in homes with poor energy efficiency. A number of Cambridgeshire residents individual invitations to apply for this.

Anglian Water and Cambridge Water announced in the autumn their preferred location for a new reservoir in the Fens, north of Chatteris, to come onstream in the late 2030s. A planning application will come in due course and progress through a number of stages. It will be a decision for the Secretary of State through the Planning Inspectorate, as with other major infrastructure schemes.

The council has published an interim Tree Strategy, which it will revise once it has baseline information about what trees the council has, where they are, and how the council can expand and improve its tree assets.

We received details of the County Council's carbon emissions for the year. There was a significant reduction in the early stages of the pandemic, due to construction work ceasing, but this is likely to increase again in future years.

We agreed a motion to the Full Council calling for managed divestment by the council's Pension Fund from fossil fuels.

The council ran a #LetsGetOutdoors campaign over the summer to encourage residents to make use of Cambridgeshire's fantastic parks.

6. Highways & Transport

The condition of Cambridgeshire's roads and pavements remains a serious challenge. This situation has been building for many years in which the council's approach was one of 'managed decline'. However, recent extreme weather has speeded up that decline very significantly. The peaty soil under the road surface has shrunk in hot dry weather, and expanded in wet weather, causing the surface to crater and split. Adding more tarmac to level the surface simply increases the weight and makes matters worse. The severity and extent of the problem is far beyond the maintenance budget of the council, so simply 'freeing up some money' is not an option. The council has been actively engaging with the Department for Transport to seek their support and funding.

The council used a data interpretation and modelling tool to identify a 'Safe and Dry' programme of 115 locations where work was needed to improve flood resilience, and work began on the first fifty of these locations. The council is also undertaking a two-year programme to clean and plot all gullies and surface drainage features to improve highways drainage management into the future.

The freezing spell over winter caused many road and pavement surface defects, and failure of pothole repairs. We encourage residents to report faults online.

The county council plans to fit street lighting with energy-efficient LEDs. The council spends £3.3M a year on energy for street lights, and this sum will pay back in under six years.

The working group on Heavy Goods Vehicles produced a new policy and criteria against which to judge applications for weight limits in villages. A number of applications have already come forward. The new funding pot for 20MPH schemes has attracted a large amount of interest.

In autumn the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) consulted on its proposals for improved bus provision and active travel in the Cambridge area, which it proposed to fund through a charge for driving in a 'Sustainable Travel Zone' between 7:00AM and 7:00PM on weekdays.

The results of the consultation will be published in the late spring, and the GCP needs to listen to the concerns of residents. The current proposals are not fair or equitable for South Cambs residents, and should not be implemented. What is needed is action to address the decades of decline in public transport inflicted by successive Governments and local councils.

7. Combined Authority

The Combined Authority has had a somewhat turbulent year, including an attempt to depose the elected Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (dubbed the Fenpowder Plot) which was unsuccessful. Most significantly, the auditors (EY) wrote to the Authority in June expressing concerns about the functioning of the Combined Authority, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities has become involved, setting some clear requirements for improvement.

The Combined Authority has agreed an Improvement programme with package of external support, and an Independent Improvement Board has been established.

In September 2022 Stagecoach gave six weeks' notice of its intention to withdraw from a large number of bus routes. The Combined Authority pulled together a tender process at very short notice, and was able to find new providers for most of those routes, though there have been changes in frequency and extent of several of them. Additional funding was diverted to support these routes, and the Mayor has decided to levy a precept which will be added to the council tax to ensure the stability of these services for a further year. The Combined Authority really needs to move ahead with a system of franchising of local bus services, which would give democratic control of routes, timetables, and fares, but to do this it needs to find sources of large amounts of income, and in any case franchising would take around five years to implement. Meanwhile the Combined Authority is finalising a Bus Strategy for submission to Government.

APPENDIX A: Cambourne to Cambridge (C2C) Busway

Cambourne situation is acute – a town built with no decent public transport, now with children growing up and reaching secondary school age and further developments to come (in Bourn and Camborne - which are the best alternative to developing in the green belt) - it is extremely important to address the chronic lack of public transport in Camborne.

Officers have given a clear steer that the proposed on-road route is not good enough to meet the needs of Camborne, and risks disturbing Madingley Wood, and ancient and hugely bio diverse site (SSI). It also involves cutting down trees, including some which are in very sensitive sites. The officers' view has been tested as it has been subject to an independent assessment, which has confirmed the view.

The loss of trees in Coton Orchard, a private site without public access, is a significant issue for us. However, the final route will be designed to reduce to a minimum the number of lost trees, almost all (or potentially all) of which will be commercial fruit trees around 30 years old. It is very likely that large replacement sites with a wilder mix of native species will be able to more than replace the lost biodiversity, along with other benefits such as public access to wilderness, and a bus stop for Coton. It is also important to remember that the busway option will bring with it cycling space too. There will therefore be carbon reduction gains from providing improvements for active travel, as well as public transport meaning fewer private car journeys will be necessary. Supporting the current proposals was a balanced decision. It did not come easily however all the research and information gathered over the many years leading up to it provided evidence for moving it forward.

APPENDIX B: 20 mph zone FAQs

Does a 20mph zone have any effects on maintenance, i.e. positively/negatively in comparison to a 30mph/40mph road?

Outside of any site specific risk assessment or remaining available budget determining whether a road in a higher speed limit is prioritised over one within a 20mph limit there are no negative maintenance implications should a 20mph limit be introduced.

Over time we also expect that introducing a 20mph limit will impact positively on our future maintenance costs in the following ways

- The potential removal of any road markings other than statutory or safety related ones throughout 20mph areas.
- A reduction in the lengths of higher more expensive materials and High Friction Surfacing required on the approaches to signalised crossings.
- A reduction in the amount of signs and sign lighting units as the requirements and guidance is significantly relaxed in a 20mph limit compared to a 0mph or above in this regard.
- A reduction in fixed Vehicle Activated Signs / flashing signs and the future maintenance costs associated with these as they would become obsolete.

How can we make Parishes aware of who is involved with regards to the final decision making / who is the delegated authority for TRO related objections?

I will pick this up with our Policy & Regulation team and see what can be pulled together to inform parishes of the current process.

Clarification that buffer zones in some cases would be automatically put in alongside the 20mph where applicable.

Where possible, and budget allowing this will be the case on all approaches to 20mph limits where there is currently a speed limit of 50mph or higher on the approaches to the proposed start of the 20mph.