

Gamlingay Division Councillors Report – South Cambridgeshire District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council – April May 2020

The Gamlingay Division comprises the Parishes of Abington Pigotts, Arrington, Barrington, Croydon, Gamlingay, Guilden Morden, Litlington, Hatley, Orwell, Shingay-cum-Wendy, Steeple Morden, Tadlow & Wimpole. This report is /for all Division Parish Councils but please be aware that it will include items that may have little or no relevance to your particular Parish. Apologies in advance!

Your Councillors are always ready to help. If you have any questions about these - or indeed any other - matters, please do not hesitate to contact County Councillor Sebastian Kindersley on 01767 651982 or skindersley@hotmail.com or write to the Manor Barn, East Hatley, SG19 3JA District Councillor Bridget Smith (Gamlingay Ward, SCDC) is on 01767 650510 or bridget@glockling.com – twitter and District Councillor Aidan van de Weyer (Barrington, Orwell, the Eversdens & Wimpole SCDC Ward) can be called on 01223 870 869 or email him aidan@mishmush.com You can also follow your councillors on Twitter: @Cllrbridget, @SebKindersley @aidanvdew

Because of the ongoing Pandemic we have decided to focus our Annual Report on what is happening now – rather than pre-Covid! – with the exception of the Budget positions of both Councils. The world is going to be a very different place indeed once lockdown starts to be relaxed and we will have many more issues to face than the usual round of potholes and missed bin collections!

South Cambridgeshire District Council Budget

£5 million has been pledged in South Cambridgeshire to tackle the global climate emergency. The money will go towards improvements linked to the District Council's 'green to the core' priorities. This includes improving the Council's offices to cut carbon emissions and energy bills, providing communities with grants for projects that cut carbon emissions in their areas, making Council houses more energy efficient and helping people cut the amount of food they waste.

In 2018 the Council declared a climate emergency and pledged to reach net zero carbon by 2050. To help move toward that goal the Council plans to invest in 2020-21a further £100,000 on Zero Carbon Community grants for community initiatives to cut carbon emissions and tackle climate change, £1.9 million 'greening' of its offices to cut energy bills and show others how they could go green and a further £1.3 million on improving energy efficiency of Council homes. In addition £1.3m will replace 1,800 District Council owned streetlights with LEDs to reduce energy consumption by 60% and £400,000 on an electric bin lorry to see whether it is viable to shift from a diesel to an all-electric fleet.

In 2020-21 the Council expects to generate over £3.5 million from investments which will be spent on local services and help offset cuts to their funding by central Government. The Council's budget also proposes investing an extra £200,000 in expanding the mobile warden scheme in the district. Local Mobile Warden groups support older people to live independently by carrying out practical tasks such as making light meals, shopping, making appointments, filling in forms and collecting prescriptions.

A further £200,000 is also planned to be invested in increasing support for local businesses so that villages remain vibrant and new jobs are created close to where people live.

County Council Meeting - Budget 2020/21 to 2024/25

Cambridgeshire County Council approved a budget including a £4 million deficit while increasing Council Tax by 1.59% instead of by the permitted 1.99%. At the beginning of this financial year the potential gap was £21 million, so over the year the Council has had to make savings of £17 million to reduce the potential shortfall. Whilst some efficiencies have undoubtedly been justified, they have made dramatic cuts to Adult services (-£5.8m), to Highways and to Children's Services (-£6.3m). You will all be aware that our Local Highways Officer has been unable to commission work for lack of funds. Many Councillors report waiting years for simple maintenance jobs to be completed.

This pattern over recent years (2016-2019) of not raising council tax by small permissible increments, including a sustained period of total council tax freeze, has cost the council £34 million that should have been deployed to prevent this tide of disappearing public services. The difference between 1.59% and 1.99% for a Band D home is 11p/week/household which could have added £1.17m to the Council budget this year and £6.39 million over the forward plan period.

Impact of Covid-19 on Councils

Both County and District Councils have been very severely impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. Aside from the human cost – which is horrific and substantial with a third of dustbin operatives either ill or self-isolating as an example – the financial impact is again, horrific. Although the government has announced a further £1.6 billion investment to Councils it is clear that the return on investments made by Councils will be very reduced and the call on Council services will be very much increased.

This pandemic has led to significant unforeseen demands and costs – to protect the vulnerable such as older, disabled and homeless people - and in order to continue to keep normal services running, such as bin collections. This is at the same time as councils have seen a large and immediate hit to their income. Many councils use income from fees and charges to fund a range of services, such as leisure, parking and planning services, many of these services are scaled back or closed so income has dried up yet most costs including payment of staff continue to be incurred.

This extra £1.6 billion takes the total given to councils to help their communities through this crisis to over £3.2 billion, an unprecedented level of additional financial support in recent times.

Help for the Shielded List

The County Hub has sent the NHS Shielded list to the District Councils and in South Cambridgeshire this is managed by a local data controller in the district's 10 patches. Many residents don't want further assistance especially the food parcels. The data controllers are mainly councillors but there are other trusted volunteers involved.

So far three lists have been distributed to local groups: those over 70 years taken from the electoral register, vulnerable SCDC housing tenants compiled by the Housing Team and the NHS Shielded List. There's a lot of duplication and the data controllers have been cleaning them up as well as dividing up for the local volunteers on a need to know basis.

Patch officers are also working with district members and the local groups to identify others not on these lists to ensure comprehensive knowledge of who needs help in each of the wards and that

they are being covered by the local volunteers. The Council also has contact details for those who have volunteered to the Hub so that they can be used to plug gaps local to where they live. Patch officers are giving advice and calling on assistance from within the council and other services such as CCC social services.

Impact on Business

At the time of writing South Cambs DC has paid out almost 70% of its allocation of the government grants to businesses. All eligible businesses have been mailed or emailed about 300 have not responded or applied. If you think you might be eligible for a grant please visit the website www.scambs.gov.uk to check your eligibility and to register. We are aware that there are many small businesses who have fallen through the net and are not getting any financial support. Do please email your MP, Anthony Browne, about this.

Please also let South Cambs know who you are by emailing greatercambridge.business@cambridgeshire.gov.uk. You'll be added to an email list for the one stop shop newsletter which is being updated every few days. There is also a lot of information about borrowing money for businesses on the Gov.UK website. It appears the easiest option is to go through the British Business Bank (from HMG) with the simplest system and a 6% fixed interest rate.

South Cambs will soon be fully mobilised to help in small business recovery and to make sure that when we get to the end of the crisis we still have jobs and businesses in our villages. If you need any advice please do not hesitate to contact the council directly or Bridget on cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk

Urgent appeal for foster carers across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

The number of people enquiring about becoming foster carers has dipped, with the immediate need being for teenagers, children with additional needs and sibling groups.

People who believe they can make a positive difference to a child's life are encouraged to contact the council today. All carers receive training, 24 hour access to support, along with allowances. As a foster carer you need to have the time, patience and determination to support and help vulnerable children and young people who are living away from their families. You will need to be over 21 and have a spare bedroom in your home. Visit: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/fostering. email fostering@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or call 0800 052 0078

Testing

The national testing programme has now expanded capacity to test other frontline workers who are having to self-isolate due to having coronavirus-like symptoms or because a member of their household has symptoms. The full list of eligible employers now includes:

All NHS and social care staff – including hospital, community and primary care, and relevant staff providing ancillary support to frontline NHS services (e.g. accommodation catering) and voluntary workers, Police, fire and rescue services and Local authority staff – including core and essential workers such as those working with vulnerable children and adults, victims of domestic violence, the homeless and rough sleepers, and those staff essential to the continuity of business.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

Mental Health - Every Mind Matters

All over the country we're staying at home to protect the NHS and save lives. We'll all be experiencing highs and lows and it's perfectly normal to miss loved ones, get frustrated, feel anxious or stressed. There are things we can all do to look after our mental wellbeing at this time. Every Mind Matters can help get you started with your NHS online plan, showing you simple steps to help deal with stress, boost your mood and feel on top of things. The NHS Every Mind Matters website provides simple tips and advice for you to look after your mental wellbeing during this time – visit www.everymindmatters.co.uk to get your free online personal Mind Plan.

Are you ill?

There is real concern building that people are not coming forward early enough with symptoms of other serious illnesses - heart attacks, strokes, cancer symptoms - as they are concerned that there is not enough capacity in the system due to COVID-19. This is not the case and people are being urged to come forward with these symptoms early, as usual.

People in Danger

We are aware that as a result of the lockdown situation a number of children, young people and adults are more vulnerable to abuse and neglect. We would like to remind everyone that during the Covid-19 crisis concerns that a child or young person is being abused or neglected, a referral should be made to Cambridgeshire Children - 0345 045 5203.

Highways

Highways teams are key workers - Crews across Cambridgeshire continue to carry out safety critical work and essential highways maintenance, any on-going work is being carried out in accordance with government health and safety measures, with workforces practising social distancing.

Highways teams are aware of concerns from members of the public around continuing work at this time and are keen to stress that any work will only be carried out where it is safe to do so.

Bonfires and BBQs

With the sun expected to continue to shine, lighting a bonfire in the garden or having a BBQ is ever more tempting. However Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service are urging you to think before lighting a fire and consider the impact it might have. The message is simple around bonfires - don't have any bonfires!

It is possible to have a safe BBQ, but please follow some simple tips: placing it on level ground away from fences, sheds, trees and other garden furniture, wait until it is fully out and cooled down before disposing of it and where possible, keep a bucket of water, sand, or a garden hose nearby for emergencies. So far since the government advice to stay at home, crews have attended more than 50 outdoor fires.

It could also aggravate health conditions for neighbours, particularly if they are isolating due to COVID-19 symptoms.

The Cambridgeshire Coronavirus Community Fund

This is offering grants to help Parish, Town, District, City and County Councils, along with local charities and groups to deal with issues affecting older and vulnerable people in our community as a result of the continuing threat of COVID-19. Grants between £1,000 and £5,000 are available for projects that aim to tackle the impact of financial hardship, potential for hunger, lack of shelter, health issues, loneliness, isolation, etc.

<https://www.cambscf.org.uk/cambridgeshire-coronavirus-community-fund.html>

Drugs

There have been two successful drugs raids in the Gamlingay division very recently. Acting on information from the public, the force's South Cambs Neighbourhood Team and Rural Crime Action Team raided a house in Waresley Road, Gamlingay – finding a small amount of cannabis, cocaine, debt sheets and a large quantity of cash. Two men, who are in their 20s, were found inside the house and are assisting with enquiries. This was a direct result of information received from the public.

Police also uncovered a cannabis factory in Arrington worth more than an estimated £850,000 – again acting on intelligence received from members of the public. The property in Ermine Way yielded more than 1,000 cannabis plants across seven outbuildings at various stages of growth, three suspected stolen vehicles and two men aged 32 and 37 detained and arrested on suspicion of cultivation of cannabis and immigration offences. A third man, aged 55, was arrested on suspicion of cultivation of cannabis and handling stolen goods. They all remain in custody.

Information about illegal drug activity can be reported via www.cambs.police.uk/report or by calling 101.

New Road Gamlingay

A reminder that this will be closed between 8 June and 19 June 2020 for bridge works (at time of writing!)

Lastly, Thank YOU!

It may be premature to thank residents who have contributed so much to the community since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. However the way everyone has rallied around – and so quickly in so many different ways – has been really extraordinary. We are truly blessed to be part of such a wonderful community. Whatever you have done – big or small – will have made all the difference – so THANK YOU!

Your Councillors are here to help you. Please do feel free to contact us with comments, questions, problems or complaints. We hope we can help but if we can't we are likely to know someone who can! *****