

## **Gamlingay Division Councillors Report – South Cambridgeshire District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council – November 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](mailto: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 [Cllr.BridgetSmith@scamb.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.BridgetSmith@scamb.gov.uk) 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](mailto:aidan@mishmush.com) You can also follow your councillors on Twitter: [@Cllrbridget](https://twitter.com/Cllrbridget), [@SebKindersley](https://twitter.com/SebKindersley) [@aidanvdew](https://twitter.com/aidanvdew)

### **Policing Changes**

Cambridgeshire's Chief Constable has announced changes to policing in order to assist in saving £1.7 million in 2021/22. Included in the cuts are the reduction of PCSOs from 80 to 40, but with a single role profile and improved alignment to their team and they will cover all 28 neighbourhoods in the county to deal with the issues that matter most to the local community. Also going is the community safety team resulting in the reduction of six community safety officer posts and the closure of nine enquiry offices (NOT the police stations), with the implementation of a team of police officers to provide people in each local authority area with an appointment-based service to allow members of the public to make an appointment to speak to an officer.

Chief Constable Nick Dean said: "We have had to make some incredibly difficult decisions over the past 12 months when considering how we balance the needs of the community and the policing service we provide, with being able to manage within the budget we have – we simply could not continue with the existing neighbourhood policing model with the budget constraints we currently face, and are likely to have in the coming years.

### **Volunteer Police Cadets**

The police are encouraging young people between 13 and 18 to join the Volunteer Police Cadets. The aim is to encourage the spirit of adventure and good citizenship to anyone wishing to support their community and

gain an understanding of policing. It is not to recruit police officers for the future. If you are interested and can spare 3 or more hours a month, please contact [Cadets@cambs.pnn.police.UK](mailto:Cadets@cambs.pnn.police.UK)

## **County Council Meeting**

The County Council met at the end of October and considered four motions. The first addressed the increasing underfunding of education for children with special educational needs and more specifically to ask the Government the whereabouts of £28million which is the current hole in the SEN budget. We agreed to write to our MPS.

The next motion asks for another letter to be written in support of restoring powers to local authorities regarding the allocation of school funding. It's a good sense motion and it is carried unanimously.

Thirdly comes a motion which calls on the Council to do more than write a letter. It calls for the Council to gather evidence regarding the adverse impact (delays and cost overruns) of underground and inadequately documented utilities on highways projects and to recommend ways in which such can be avoided in future. Carried unanimously.

Lastly a motion about ant-Semitism and members wonder aloud if maybe it's motivated by a desire to embarrass the Labour group. There are two amendments both of which attempt to widen the motion and to make it more active. They both fail and - despite the heat of the earlier debate - clearly councillors felt that the original motion was better than nothing and therefore passed it unanimously.

## **Solar Together Cambridgeshire**

The collective purchasing scheme for Cambridgeshire residents to invest in solar panels and/or battery storage, has got off to a great start, with nearly 6,000 households signing up – much higher than initially anticipated. The winning supplier is Greenscape Energy, with an average discount of 30% versus typical market pricing. The scheme is still accepting further registrations, so if you want to sign up, here is the link: <https://solartogether.co.uk/cambridgeshire/home#>

## **Recycling Centres and Freecycle**

All nine of Cambridgeshire's Household Recycling Centres remain open during the restrictions, but there is significantly reduced capacity so do avoid unnecessary visits. One good way of disposing of unwanted items is **Freecycle**, which facilitates giving (and getting) stuff for free locally and keeping good stuff out of landfills..

## **Additional Parking at Gray's Road**

Works will shortly begin on the much-needed, additional parking spaces in Gray's Road Gamlingay starting on November 16<sup>th</sup> and lasting 10 days. We know that parking is limited in the area and that these works will add to the issues during their construction, but please bear with us. Letters will be distributed to all residents alerting them and including a map of the changes.

## **Covid 19**

We are lucky that South Cambridgeshire is a 'relatively' Covid-free area. However, please remain on your guard. In the last seven days Potton has seen 10 new cases and Biggleswade 22. To November 2<sup>nd</sup> the rate in the Gamlingay Orwell Barrington area (defined by Public Health England) rose to 6.

## **News from the Fire Authority**

Plans have been drawn up for the police and fire services to share the current fire station in St Neots and this will allow police to sell the current police station. All staff colleagues in the Fire & Rescue Service will receive an honorarium of £50 in recognition of the way they stepped up over and beyond during the pandemic.

## **First Budget Thoughts**

An over-lengthy and fractious meeting of the County Council's General Purposes Committee last month considered the development of the Council's budget for next year. The prospects are not good. Even if the battle against COVID goes well, the Council will need to find savings of £40M in the financial year starting next April. If COVID goes bad - and the evidence so far suggests cases are continuing to rise - then the savings needed could be over £82M.

It is unlikely, to put it mildly, that the Government will come charging over the hill with £82M in its pocket. And unless there is more cash coming Cambridgeshire's way, the options available to the Council will mainly be 'efficiency savings', cuts to services, increased fees and charges, lucrative commercial investments\*, and council tax.

(\*Not working out so well at the moment - the money put into buying student accommodation in Cambridge and leisure facilities in Wisbech isn't making great returns in a pandemic.)

Already lines are being drawn ready for the political arguments that will last through to February's budget meeting and beyond. The predictions we've been given so far assume that Councillors running the Council will go for an increase of two per cent in council tax for adult social care (a service facing huge increases in need), but zero council tax increase for general services.

We don't yet know what maximum council tax increase the Government will allow this coming year. In the past few years councils have been allowed to set rises of around two or three per cent without having to conduct a ruinously expensive referendum - and the Government generally assumes councils will do that. Assuming the maximum this coming year is of a similar level, it might be considered sensible to start building that figure into the calculations. (If the Council were to try to bridge the whole of a £40M funding gap by way of council tax increases, the rise would have to be about 15 per cent, and nobody - absolutely nobody - is suggesting that.)

Administration councillors are talking about council tax rises being their last resort after every other option. We say that while nobody relishes higher council taxes, cutting services and increasing charges will affect the most vulnerable population worst, and assuming an increase in council tax of a couple of per cent at this stage would help bridge that gap (albeit only partly in the scheme of the financial problems unfolding).

Opposition Councillors suggested, not unreasonably, that the Council considers raising council tax as one of the ways to address it. The administration doesn't like this, having made a virtue in recent years of not raising council tax and at the same time squeezing budgets. Fair enough - it's their policy - but that doesn't make a contrary suggestion unacceptable. So how was it described? This time it was not 'political' which might have been forgiven, because it does reflect a difference in policy, but 'disgusting'. The word was used not once but twice.

The Council is now approaching Government to ask for more financial support. That's all well and good, but the Government will want to see the Council doing all it can to bridge its own gap - and appearing to resolutely stand against raising council tax at all probably won't persuade the Government of the urgency of the Council's case.

It's also fair to say that the Council has been asking the Government for 'fair funding' for many years with little to show for it, and there's no reason to assume they will have any better luck this year when COVID has already trashed most of the economy, and Brexit in a couple of months' time will trash the rest.

### **What does my Council Tax buy?**

Councillors often get asked "What does my Council Tax buy?" so we thought we'd supply some examples over the next few months. You may be aware that when a child comes into care, the County Council becomes that child's Corporate Parent. This means we have the collective responsibility as a Council, ie elected members, employees and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us until the age of 25.

Latest data shows we have 714 children in care for whom we are responsible. 74 of them are unaccompanied children seeking asylum and 229 are in long term placements or foster homes. Sadly this figure is declining – mostly due to Covid – and so if you are interested in fostering do please get in touch! 65 are disabled and 77% come from a white ethnic background. At any one time between 20 and 30 of these children are 'missing'. The good news is that the number of adoption orders granted is up by 15% and increasing.

### **'Nottingham Knockers'**

We recently received reports that 'Nottingham Knockers' have been operating in different areas of the county. Nottingham Knockers are traders who sell items from a bag on the doorstep, typically cleaning products such as dusters, sprays etc. They usually tell a story that they are former prisoners who are rehabilitating themselves and getting back into work in order to appeal to residents' emotions and get them to purchase their wares.

Items are usually overpriced and often just shy of ten pounds each so that if anyone does agree to buy, they have to find a note to pay. This helps criminals to identify addresses where cash may be kept in the house and therefore prime targets for future distraction burglaries and other crimes. Please spread the word about this to any vulnerable people you may know and please remind them that it is quite acceptable not to answer the door to cold callers.

### **Drains**

There are continuing problems with drains and gullies throughout the Division with many frustrations over shortcomings in Highways responding positively when drainage problems are logged on the County website. We've already lamented the fact that the County Council is no longer doing 'routine gully maintenance' – i.e. not clearing drains on a regular scheduled basis. That this is the case is a matter of deep concern: our drains, roads, pavements and other elements of highways infrastructure are in a state of 'managed decline' with nowhere near the funds needed to bring them up to an acceptable standard. This year an already stretched workforce has been further depleted by the secondment of a number to Covid response. They are now still catching up – and hopefully won't be seconded again. All that said, it's our job to follow up everything that we're made aware of, so please do get in touch if you're concerned.

### **Bus Services.**

It will be no surprise that bus operators are really struggling during the pandemic. Passenger numbers have dropped even lower than earlier in the year in the last 2 weeks and are currently running at about 30% of pre-Covid numbers, Operator costs are running at 95% of pre-Covid levels which is obviously not sustainable and of course we are advised to avoid

public transport unless we have no choice. So it looks as if this might need more intervention from the Money Tree.

### **South Cambs DC Planning Service.**

We have been working very hard indeed to improve the new shared planning service which is joint between South Cambs and Cambridge City. Things are moving well in the right direction and the processes are getting quicker and more efficient. We now have ONE validation process – streamlined – for both authorities which has successfully conquered the historic backlog. The team are now working toward reaching the target of 5 days to validate an application.

### **New Business Grants**

Businesses premises forced to close as a result of CV restrictions are to be eligible for government grants of up to £3000 per month. To be eligible you have to be paying business rates but we are expecting further guidance on discretionary grants which we hope will be available to those businesses that are experiencing serious hardship or have had to close but do not meet the criteria of the main grant pot. All the latest information is on the website which is updated daily. You can also get regular updates by registering for our Open For Business Newsletter which will be updated every time significant new guidelines are issued. If you have any queries that are not dealt with on the website do not hesitate to email [openforbusiness@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:openforbusiness@scambs.gov.uk) to make contact with our specialist business support team.

### **Community Grants**

South Cambs DC has made further money available to help community groups remobilise to deal with the second lockdown. These are small amounts of money in the first case but if your community has special circumstances you can apply for additional funding to help you meet your community's specific needs.

### **Government's Planning White paper.**

The consultation on the government's Planning White Paper (PWP) closed last week. Shockingly, we are yet to find anyone with anything positive to say about it. And with good reason: It's terrible.

The PWP is thin on detail and ignores opportunities to address the inadequacies of the National Planning Policy Framework or the horrible consequences of new permitted development rights. Nor does it pay heed to Government putting its own planning inspectorate in order which was partly responsible for the 4.5 years it took to approve the current South Cambs local plan resulting in 2 years of no 5 year housing land supply and 4000 unplanned houses built with no financial contribution to the communities they were sited in.

The Government loves to play to its audience and its ambition to build 'beautiful' does just that. But if a national design standard to deliver 'beauty' results in houses with no reference to local, indigenous architecture then we have countrywide 'cookie cutter' developments and you will not know if you are in Harston or Hartington. Moreover, there is little mention of standards, or of climate change or homes that support health and wellbeing - all the things that really matter to people.

The new housing minister Chris Pincher's focus is entirely on numbers and speeding up housing delivery. And how does he plan to do this? By encouraging small and medium size builders into the market but we get no clue as to how this can be achieved. The last 15 years has seen a 50% decline in SME developers and though they often build better, build quicker and build cheaper they will need help to purchase our very expensive land. If the government is not going to give them that help councils need to have the powers and resources to do so.

Additionally the proposal that no affordable housing will be required for developments of less than 50 units will kill off any new affordable homes in many of our villages, depriving people of the choice to live where they want to live - often close to family, support networks or jobs.

Mr. Pincher was quite convinced that Parish Councils and residents would be so delighted that they were to play a full part in local plan formation that they would not mind that this would be the point at which their voices ceased to be heard. Once 'zones' were created development could go ahead and as long as it is 'beautiful' all will be well and everyone will be happy. Our view, having been District Councillors for a long time, is that could not be further from the truth. The Parish Council and resident voice adds hugely to the evidence for and against development.

This white paper is a 'developers charter'. No more, no less. It removes democracy from planning, it silences local voices, it centralises decision making. It's no wonder no one has a good word to say about it.

### **Electric Bin Lorry**

We are very pleased to finally be trailing a new electric bin lorry with a view to gradually exchanging our whole fleet of refuse vehicles as part of our work to become a zero carbon authority. Long may it continue!

### **New London Luton Flightpaths**

We have signed a joint letter to all local MPs with our colleagues over the border in Bedfordshire asking the MPs to intervene with the NATS proposals. It reads thus: "We, the undersigned strongly condemn the flight path proposals recently put forward by Luton Airport in conjunction with NATS Holdings. These proposed flight paths head directly over a significant number of rural communities in your constituencies not limited

to, but including Arlesey, Shefford, Gamlingay, Potton, Biggleswade, Sandy, St Neots, Abbotsley, Wrestlingworth and Langford.

As these flights descend there is likely to be significant noise and pollution impact on our area. Prior to COVID there were an average of 300 flights a day landing at Luton airport. This consultation and the flight paths contained were not shared with local authority councillors during the analysis stage meaning neither elected representatives or residents were able to influence the options.

It is clear there are other options for flight paths which would have not resulted in such an impact. It is not clear why these have been excluded from this consultation. It is also far from clear that the existing situation is not sustainable for some time to come.

The consultation represents a fait accompli and offers no choice to the communities who see all options head directly over them.

In February 2020, the UK Court of Appeal declared the planned third runway at Heathrow Airport illegal as it breached the UK's climate mitigation commitments and the Paris Accord. In October 2020 Heathrow Airport commenced an appeal to the Supreme Court. In spite of a dramatic Covid-19 fall in passenger numbers - London Luton Airport passenger numbers for the first nine months of 2020 were half those of the same period in 2019 - and despite the UK having the world's third largest CO2 emission from aviation after China and the US, "every major commercial UK airport has plans to expand, with many hoping to double passenger numbers by 2030."

This free-for-all, uncoordinated approach is a clear breach of the UK Government's Aviation 2050 Strategy which enshrines "developing a partnership for sustainable growth which meets rising passenger demand, balanced with action to reduce environmental and community impacts." The London Luton Airport expansion plans are also clearly at odds with the Aviation 2050 Strategy and therefore with government policy.

We ask that you write to the Secretary of State for transport and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs condemning these plans and seeking a restart in the whole process so that residents and local authorities are involved at all stages.

Furthermore, we ask that you do everything within your powers as the Members of Parliament for the affected areas to ensure these flight paths do not run over the areas currently selected."

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!

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