

Gamlingay Division Councillors Report – South Cambridgeshire District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council – June 2023

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. 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 or District Councillor for The Mordens Heather Williams: cllr.williamsh@scambs.gov.uk / 07885 774 775.

Local Government Changes

Elections in May for many local authorities have seen a number of changes locally. Bridget Smith continues as Leader of South Cambs DC; the new Leader of Cambridge City is Cllr Mike Davey and Sebastian Kinderlsey is very honored to have been elected Chair of Cambridgeshire County Council. Adjacent to the Gamlingay Division Cllr Adam Zerny who represents Potton on Central Beds in now the Leader of Central Beds.

East West Rail

We could write a book about the poor performance on nearly every level by East West Rail. Two years after a non-statutory consultation the route alignment has now been announced. What does East West Rail mean for us locally? The plan confirms the £4bn extension will run from Bedford via a new station at Tempsford to a further new station at Cambourne and then on to Cambridge South Station which is under construction.

Access to two new stations may be good news for many especially at Tempsford, which will also have the London/Peterborough mainline running through it. However, this station comes at the price of a major new town at Tempsford - which is very close to Gamlingay. Similarly a station at Cambourne makes further development there likely. Construction of the railway line will take years and the new development will take decades. This will put huge pressure on existing infrastructure. We are also extremely concerned that there has been no firm commitment to the railway being electrified. Full details can be found on eastwestrail.co.uk. Most irritating of all the Northern Approach to Cambridge (as promoted by CamBedRailRoad and Cambridge Approaches) was judged by East West Rail itself to be cheaper, easier and quicker to deliver and more sustainable but the Southern Approach was still preferred - so expect a number of Judicial Reviews over the life of this project!

So why has EWR gone for an option even they recognise is less than ideal? It is closely tied to an announcement the day before from Government which tells us Life Sciences is the key industry in Greater Cambridgeshire. Recognising this, the Chancellor announced a £650 million fund to fire up this sector and drive forward the government's desire to grow the UK economy. As Cambridge and Oxford are the two main hubs of Life Sciences in the UK and travelling between the two cities is challenging government has signalled its ongoing commitment to the new East West Rail line between both cities. It states that this region is a globally renowned hub of science, research and innovation, and the railway will support job creation and growth at towns and cities along the route. The Southern route has a direct link to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus through the Cambridge South Station. It also has a proposed train station north of Cambourne but key is the statement that

“With the potential to unlock £103 billion of growth through new homes, businesses and job opportunities, this crucial line will also serve as a catalyst for development in one of Europe’s most vibrant local economies while making travel quicker, cheaper and easier across the region.”

There are further implications to that statement for future unpacking.

And what about roads?

The upgrade of the A428 is to go ahead now that a number of legal challenges have been overturned. The road will become dual carriageway and hugely improve congestion at the Black Cat roundabout and at Caxton Gibbet. For further details go to <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/>

...and Airspace

The revised Luton Airspace Stack (approved in Nov 2021) continues to cause people distress especially when aircraft use their air brakes over the villages. The review of the new stack has been extended so please continue to email complaints to noise.enquiries@ltn.aero

Making Connections

As we write the Greater Cambridge Partnership has just published the results of the Making Connection consultation held before Christmas. The bottom line is most people would support vastly improved public transport and most people would prefer not to pay a Congestion Charge in Cambridge. Over 70% of people were in favour of the future transport network – with more buses to more locations, cheaper fares and longer operating times supported by better walking and cycling infrastructure to give people faster, cheaper and more reliable travel alternatives to the car.

58% of respondents opposed the proposed Sustainable Travel Zone (STZ) as the means for delivering the transport vision. Opposition increased with age from 35 to 64 with 55-64 year olds the most likely to oppose. Those who lived outside of Cambridge were also more likely to oppose.

34% of people support the STZ as proposed. Support was highest among the youngest and the oldest respondents, who are more likely to find it most difficult to access education and healthcare due to the limitations of the existing bus network. Support was highest in the city centre and west of the city. Around half of those who oppose the STZ did support the vision for better buses.

The views from organisations such as business, healthcare and others were broadly supportive of the plans but with caveats about the impact on staff or those who were vulnerable. We are still wading through the reports so there will no doubt be more to come...

Potholes

With better weather the County Council is getting on top of the pothole issue – which we all agree has been horrific. Since Christmas 27,000 potholes have been fixed, with 10,000 still to go although new reports come in all the time. Two extra teams have been at work alongside another two additional Dragon patchers with the intention of clearing Parishes of potholes. Government has recognised our issues with an extra £3.6m funding. It’s worth noting that between 2014 and 2021 the County spent more per head of population in Fenland on resurfacing and reconstruction of highways than it did on South Cambs and Cambridge combined. The policy of ‘managed decline’ of highways

was a very poor decision; one reversed by the Joint Administration from 2021. From July to late Autumn this year all Cambridgeshire roads will be surveyed for hidden defects (likely to lead to potholing in the future) with the problems recorded and fixed using extra teams and kit and this will go some way to ensuring we don't have a repeat of the Winter of 22/23.

Royston Recycling Centre – access for Cambs residents

Lots of questions have come our way about Royston Recycling Centre and access for Cambridgeshire residents – following the decision earlier this spring by Hertfordshire County Council, which owns and operates the site, to restrict access to Herts residents only. Susan and Sebastian, representing Cambridgeshire villages bordering Hertfordshire, have worked with Cambridgeshire County Council to proactively engage with Herts CC, to find a solution to allow the thousands of Cambs residents living closer to Royston than any Cambridgeshire recycling centre, to continue using Royston.

With constructive discussions underway (and needing to work through democratic decision processes) Herts CC is allowing Cambs residents access to Royston Recycling Centre – as the notice on their website clearly indicates. Please note that the process has not yet concluded and we hope that the final result will be positive – but while efforts are underway, Cambs residents' access to Royston is protected.

4-day-week trial update

This initiative by South Cambs District Council has generated intensive national press interest, positive and negative. Some inaccurate information has been perpetuated. The following is intended as a helpful summary. Please do read the reports on the South Cambs District Council website (following the link below), including the independent assessment of the trial by the Bennet Institute at Cambridge University, for an interesting and fuller picture.

The 4-day-week has been trialled quite extensively in the private sector; South Cambs District Council was the first local authority in the county to undertake a trial. This occurred between January-March 2023. In May, due to the positive results of the trial which indicated no negative impact on productivity and staff in better health, it was decided to extend the trial for a 12-month period to allow in-depth understanding of its potential benefits for the people of South Cambs.

The key impetus for the trial was a stubborn difficulty in recruiting to posts and reliance on more costly agency staff to fill vacancies. This cost to the public purse has been substantial, at a time when public sector budgets are under enormous strain. Some areas of council, for example planning, are especially prone to losing newly trained local authority staff to higher paid private sector jobs. Councils can't match private sector pay but they can offer different ways of working.

The premise of the four-day-week is that productivity must not be adversely affected and that a healthier and more rested workforce can perform in a more focused and productive way, making up that 'lost' time. The world really has changed and many factors have had a profound impact on the local authority workplace – not just Covid but also technology, the impacts of the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing austerity and deep cuts to public services, changes in the overseas workforce since departure from the EU, and a general decline in the health of the general population.

Disruption of staff turnover is something that people may recognize through their own experience in interaction with the council: multiple successive planning officers for example mean lost institutional memory in dealing with a planning application. Training new staff is expensive, and when staff don't remain in post for long that training cost is lost. This is public money. £2m a year is spent on agency staff; of which the trial already saved £300k with another £700k to be added this financial year – halving this bill and bringing benefit to taxpayers – you and me.

Public sector workforce recruitment difficulties are widespread. Jobs are often more stressful than before the pandemic, for many reasons including because services might still be in recovery mode. This can cause understandable public frustration, as well as days lost to staff illness. In many of the sectors that your councillors come into contact with, workforce retention, and then recruitment, are cited as number one risk.

Prior to the announcement of the four-day week trial at South Cambs, a survey was undertaken to gauge staff health and wellbeing. When the trial concluded, results showed that health and wellbeing improved, while productivity was unaffected. Although the trial was not intended to measure improvement to recruitment, there was evidence of improvement with strong applications to a particularly hard-to-fill post.

On this basis it was decided to further the trial to a 12-month period, which will allow time to measure impacts on recruitment. <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/four-day-working-week-trial/>

Civil Parking Enforcement

This long-awaited scheme is expected but not guaranteed to be approved by Parliament in November. It should be ready to go pending current work updating enforceable lines and signs – some of which you may have already noted or which is planned in Gamlingay, Barrington, Arrington, Litlington and Steeple Morden.

The scheme will see traffic wardens able to enforce illegal parking. While Police have greater powers than traffic wardens will have, the scheme is necessary because police stopped enforcing parking offences about six years ago. The first five years of this scheme will cost more to administer than revenue generation by fines but the Greater Cambridge Partnership will subsidize the cost of the scheme initially.

CPE powers mean you can only enforce (hand out parking tickets) if there is a restriction to enforce such as double yellow lines, school markings where parking is not permitted etc. Verge parking or parking on a pavement where there is no adjacent restriction cannot be enforced by a traffic warden under CPE. Only the Police can deal with obstructions on the highway where no signs, lines or regulations are in place.

Affordable housing Royston Road Litlington

It is hoped that the first homes will become available at the end of 2023. If interested, please make sure to register for South Cambs Home-link which will put you on the housing register and give you most choice. <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/apply-for-housing/>

Become a mentor for care leavers

The County Council annual meeting heard a stunning presentation from a young person who had grown up in care, about the disadvantage and stigma associated with anyone growing up in care. The council has an ongoing recruitment campaign for foster parents, and now also a mentoring programme to support young people in mapping out life choices and strategies. Find out more: Become a volunteer mentor in Cambridgeshire for young care leavers.
<https://www.goal17.global/cam>

Home Upgrade Grants

Cambridgeshire has been awarded £11.5M over two years to improve energy efficiency in homes which are not on mains gas. More information, including eligibility criteria, at actiononenergycambs.org/funding

Disposal of vapes and metal recycling

Following a number of fires, an information campaign is being planned about the safe disposal of vapes and the hazards of fires in collection vehicles and waste plants arising from the batteries sealed inside these items. There is currently a six week campaign of bus advertising, radio and social media across the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough promoting the need to recycle all metals.

Biodiversity and green spaces

The County Council's Tree & Woodland Strategy is now out to tender, including assessment of tree canopy cover for the whole county, and more detailed analysis on County Council land. The strategy will also include length of hedgerow on County Council land, amounts of carbon sequestered, and areas for future tree planting. Work is also ongoing with Natural Cambridgeshire on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire, with a formal launch imminent.

County Council Annual Council

The Annual Council meeting agreed three motions from councillors including a motion to seek to ensure availability of childcare in new developments, after learning that many new developments were being built with covenants on them preventing use of domestic properties by childminders. Also agreed was a motion to recognise the experience of care leavers ('care experienced people') as equivalent to a 'protected characteristic' which councils have a duty in law to consider when making decisions (see above). Council also agreed a new People Strategy which aims to align the council's workforce to achieve the council's ambitions over the next five years. It focuses on four themes: attracting, appreciating, supporting and developing the council's staff.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The most significant item on the Combined Authority Board agenda for 31 May was the Local Transport & Connectivity Plan. This requires the two upper tier councils on the Combined Authority—Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council—to support it, and as the leader of

PCCI announced at the last minute that he would not, it was withdrawn. It is not currently clear what happens now.

The draft document's Mission Statement says: "The transport network must put improved health at its core, it must help create a fairer society, it must respond to climate change targets, it must protect our environment and clean up our air, and it must be the backbone of sustainable economic growth in which everyone can prosper. And it must bring a region of cities, market town and very rural areas closer together. It will be achieved by investing in a properly joined-up, net zero carbon transport system, which is high quality, reliable, convenient, affordable, safe, and accessible to everyone, Better, cleaner public transport will reduce private car use, and more cycling and walking will support both healthier lives and a greener region. Comprehensive connectivity, including digital improvements, will support a sustainable future for our region's nationally important and innovative economy."

The Plan's proposed approach was to deliver new high-quality active travel infrastructure, prioritise bus links including demand-responsive transport, improve the rail network, investigate new Park & Ride facilities near on the A10 near Waterbeach, improve the A10 and many other projects that need to be done now rather than awaiting the pleasure of one person.

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! *****