

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT APRIL 2024

FULL COUNCIL

The Council met on Tuesday 19 March, and received reports on senior manager pay, pay policy, and gender and ethnicity pay gaps. Five motions were proposed.

1. To work with partners to ensure our Armed Forces Covenant Officer is properly resourced; and write to Government about support for veterans, Afghan refugees, and dependents of Commonwealth veterans (**PASSED**)
2. To ask the Government to disband the Greater Cambridge Partnership and transfer its functions to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority but still let us keep the money (**DEFEATED**)
3. To oppose any new 'locally imposed forms of taxation', cost up lots of 'ambitious transformational strategic infrastructure interventions', and discuss with the Government how to pay for it (**DEFEATED**)
4. To ask the Government to introduce a proportional voting system for Police & Crime Commissioners and Mayors, and work with partners to encourage greater understanding of our tiers of local government and increase young people's participation in local elections (**PASSED**)
5. To ask the Government to commit to making the benefits and opportunities created by growth in Greater Cambridge accessible to all residents of Cambridgeshire and to commit to essential infrastructure and services to deliver growth, establish ambitious targets for affordable housing, and invest in training and education (**PASSED**)

I was asked a public question by a Fenland district councillor about why the county council had 'gone back on its resolution to do everything in its power to oppose the incinerator' at Wisbech. I explained we were still waiting for Fenland District Council to inform the county council of the advice it had obtained from its legal counsel about the prospect of success at judicial review. (Fenland has subsequently announced that it plans to seek a judicial review of the minister's decision but at the time of writing we do not know on what grounds.)

Council composition changes again

The Liberal Democrat candidate won the by-election for the vacancy in Yaxley & Farcet on Thursday 21 March. For the first time ever the Liberal Democrats are the largest group on the council. The composition of the council is as follows.

Liberal Democrats 23

Conservatives 22

Labour 9

Independents 4

Non-aligned 3

Development Corporation to decide future of Cambridge

The Government has set out more details of its plans for a huge expansion of Cambridge and the areas around it. Originally called Cambridge 2050, then Cambridge 2040, it has now been set out in a document called *The Case for Cambridge* with plans for 150,000 more houses in and around Cambridge.

The Government's spring budget included £10.2M for the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and transport to it (the Cambridge South East Transport or CSET project). A major obstacle to growth in and around Cambridge is water scarcity, to which the Government's answer is to pilot a new system of 'water credits' where 'developers can offset their development through the purchase and sale of water credits to ensure they have a neutral impact on water scarcity within Cambridge'. To describe my view on this idea as sceptical would be an understatement.

Last year, the Government appointed head of Homes England Peter Freeman to lead a new Development Corporation called the Cambridge Delivery Group to deliver the Government's vision for Cambridge. This will add yet another layer of local government to our already toppling structures, and a new and unaccountable body deciding the future of the city. Some locally elected representatives will be on an advisory board, but it appears that decisions will be taken elsewhere.

STRATEGY RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE

Household Support Fund and supermarket vouchers

The Government's budget included an announcement that it would be extending the Household Support Fund for six months. This is the funding that helps the council pay for supermarket vouchers during the school holidays for families entitled to support, as well as other payments to households in need.

The Government did not announce this in time for local councils to include it in their budgets, so the council's Strategy Resources & Performance Committee has agreed to modify its spending plans. The supermarket vouchers will therefore continue to be issued at the current rate for the next six months.

ADULTS & HEALTH

'High intensity users' of A&E services

Cambridgeshire County Council will host the 'High Intensity Users' team working with patients who frequently attend hospital A&E departments. Last year the NHS in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough spent an estimated total of £28 million on emergency care for 4,500 people who attended A&E departments between

five and ten times a year. Many of these patients have complex needs, and identifying and supporting them early can save the NHS at least forty per cent of these costs.

ASSETS & PROCUREMENT

The council's Assets & Procurement Committee has approved a new Land & Property Strategy to guide the management of its diverse portfolio of land and property. This strategy will implement actions for change and improvement highlighted in a Property Asset Management Health Check commissioned by the council from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

The committee has also approved a Commercial, Commissioning & Procurement Framework and made arrangements to reprocure water and waste water services when its current contract comes to an end in October.

COMMUNITIES SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION (COSMIC)

Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund

The council's Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund was hugely over-subscribed. Twenty-six applications were awarded funding, but none of these were within the Bottisham ward.

Cost of living

The council's Communities Social Mobility & Inclusion Committee (COSMIC) has approved an additional £150,000 to Cambridge Housing Society to deliver the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme, which supports Cambridgeshire residents facing unexpected financial difficulties.

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/parenting-and-family-support/cambridgeshire-local-assistance-scheme

The council has also allocated £400,000 to Citizens Advice to deliver income maximisation across Cambridgeshire. By the end of the third quarter of 2023/2024, Citizens Advice had supported 2,251 people, against an annual target of 2,400. This resulted in a total additional income gain of over £1.5 million.

'Closer to Communities'

The council is proceeding with a series of pilot projects to bring decision-making closer to local communities. One of these projects is in East Cambridgeshire, involving a community led environmental initiative. A consultation event will take place at The Maltings in Ely on Wednesday 24 April.

www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/supporting-communities-to-benefit-from-the-energy-transition-stakeholder-engagement-workshop-tickets-868896872937

Safe accommodation

The committee has also refreshed its Safe Accommodation Strategy for victims of domestic abuse for the next three years.

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Flooding cases

Officers from the Flood & Water team and the Drainage & Resilience team are meeting weekly to review the many cases across the county of water problems arising from Storms Babet through Henk, and the saturation arising from an exceptionally wet winter.

Flood risk enforcement

The council has refreshed its policy and protocol for enforcement under the Land Drainage Act 1991.

Fens 2100+

Fens 2100+ is a new programme of work launched in 2023 to enable the Fens to adapt to the challenges of climate change both now and into the future. It is a partnership project between the Environment Agency, Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), National Farmers Union (NFU), and Anglian Northern and Great Ouse Regional Flood & Coastal Committees (RFCCs).

Its aim is to develop a Fens-wide flood resilience investment strategy, and develop a strategic case for continued investment in flood risk management across the Fens. The project will set out the flood risk management investment choices needed so that the Fens can flourish and adapt to climate change.

The programme will develop a Fens-wide flood resilience investment strategy so that Flood Risk Management Authorities can plan for the next twenty-five years. The writing of the strategy will be completed in 2025.

Over the next 100 years, an additional £4.5 billion will be needed to manage flood risk in the Fens—based on today's costs and not accounting for climate change. Under current flood risk management funding rules half of that investment would be funded, the rest is not. The Fens 2100+ programme has been developed to address that gap.

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/east-anglia-c-e/fens2100/>

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The council is working with partners on the production of this strategy. Natural Cambridgeshire is continuing to develop an engagement and communications plan to support this piece of work.

Decarbonisation of council buildings

The council has been successful in its application for Government grant to decarbonise nine more of its own buildings including libraries and youth centres. This will help the council meet its target of 2030 for net zero for its own operations. Government funding of £1,244,550 will be added to £3,793,741 from the council's own decarbonisation fund. The works to these buildings will remove 178.44 tonnes of carbon emissions every year.

Clean energy at Park & Rides

Work is progressing on the installation of solar panels at St Ives and Babraham Park & Rides. These will provide power for the operation of the sites themselves, while also making energy available to commercial customers via a private wire.

Several electric vehicle charging points are being installed at each site, with some of these designed specifically for the access requirements of drivers with disabilities.

North Angle private wire

Work is also finally under way on the project to connect North Angle Solar Farm to the Swaffham Prior community heat network by means of a private wire.

Swaffham Prior named as finalist in international award

Meanwhile the Swaffham Prior community heat network has been named as a finalist for an international award, the Ashden Awards, recognising ground-breaking climate solutions. The project won the prestigious Edie Net Zero Award for Renewable Energy Project of the Year last November. The Ashden winners will be announced at a ceremony in London on Thursday 27 June.

Connecting Cambridgeshire

Connecting Cambridgeshire attended the Timebank coffee morning in Sutton at the end of February to talk about the upcoming national Digital Switchover. The switchover will affect not only landline telephones but also a range of telephony-dependent devices including many alarms. More information at

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9471/>

Gigabit-capable broadband coverage in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough has hit 85 per cent a year early, meaning we are above the national average and ahead of Government targets. Work is ongoing to bring future-proof connectivity to homes and businesses in harder to reach areas.

Connecting Cambridgeshire will be launching its Digital Inclusion Strategy in May.

District Digital Overviews for each district in Cambridgeshire are available at

<https://www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk/about/digital-connectivity-strategy-2021-2025/district-digital-overviews/>

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Gully clearing

The cyclical gully clearing programme, reinstated by the Joint Administration, reached this area recently, with an estimate of over a thousand gullies to be cleared in Coveney, Witcham, Mepal and Sutton. Where works have been completed elsewhere, the number of gullies cleared has been considerably higher than the estimate.

20MPH schemes

The 20MPH speed limit in Ely went live on 29 March, and a 20MPH limit has also been approved for parts of Huntingdon. Applications for fresh schemes across Cambridgeshire closed on Friday 22 March. Speed reduction schemes such as these are being funded from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's Transforming Cities Fund allocation from Government.

Hemlock management

Hemlock has been gradually establishing itself and expanding across areas of Cambridgeshire. While it is invasive, and highly toxic to livestock and humans, it is a native plant species. In public spaces under the council's control it instructs its contractor to treat hemlock using professional equipment and glyphosate. The Highways department's Green Infrastructure Team can offer advice and guidelines to private owners and occupiers on managing hemlock on their land.

Meanwhile, the council continues to carry out treatments for injurious weeds such as Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Guided buses resume two-way running

Work on a section of the Guided Busway between Cambridge Railway Station and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus to install a new safety measure is now complete and buses returned to two-way operation from Saturday 30 March.

EV charging cross-over pilot

A trial will take place across the county on a first-come first-served basis of EV car charging solutions that involve cables crossing the highway. I have encouraged council officers to be ambitious in this. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough will need ten thousand public plug-in stations by 2030, as more and more residents without off-street parking and charging capacity will be wanting to make the switch to electric vehicles.

PLANNING (including consents)

Envar inquiry

An eight-day Public Inquiry to hear the appeal against the refusal of permission for Envar's proposed incinerator at Woodhurst closed on 1 March. The inspector is expected to make his recommendation within three or four weeks, and the Secretary of State to issue a decision a month after that.

Sunnica solar farm

The statutory deadline for the Secretary of State to decide this application was reset to Thursday 11 April.

East West Rail

EWRA are planning the first stage of their statutory consultation in the first half of this year.

Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation

The Examination of this application is due to finish on Wednesday 17 April.

Fens reservoir

Anglian Water and Cambridge Water are to consult on proposals for two new strategic reservoirs for the East of England region. One reservoir is to be located in the Fens and the other in Lincolnshire. The 'phase two' non-statutory consultation will start in May 2024, and will run for eight weeks.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Combined Authority Board will be tendering for a contracted bus service to replace as much as possible of the No9 service from Littleport via Ely and Stretham to Cambridge, following the cutbacks by Stagecoach. The Combined Authority is also working on its plans for bus network improvements, £1 youth bus fare, and bus shelter improvements.

Cllr Lorna Dupré

County Councillor for the Sutton division