

### **The East Cambridgeshire Growth and Infrastructure Fund has reopened for applications.**

The scheme will provide capital funding towards the delivery of local infrastructure (including but not limited to transport, health care, social, cultural, education and recreational facilities) to assist, promote, encourage, develop and secure sustainable growth and enable people to live and/or work in East Cambridgeshire. Examples could include cycle and footpath improvements, or new community facilities such as village halls and public open spaces.

The deadline for applications is 5:00 pm on Friday 8 December 2023.

More information about the scheme and the application form can be found at

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/business/east-cambridgeshire-growth-and-infrastructure-fund>

If you have any queries please telephone 01353 665555 or email [gandifund@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:gandifund@eastcambs.gov.uk)

### **Sanctuary Housing**

Charlotte and John had a meeting with Sanctuary Housing about some aspects of their service after we received complaints from some residents. We were informed that they were improving their approach to residents, and were conscious of some inadequate communications hitherto with residents. We also pressed them on the number of empty properties in the ward, and they said that they were restoring them slowly to use. Please let one of us know if you have any concerns with Sanctuary Housing.

At the October meeting of Full Council, the Council's leadership rejected a request to ask Sanctuary Housing to attend a meeting of the Council's Operational Services Committee to answer questions from members about its empty properties. They propose to organise a behind-closed-doors seminar instead, which is disappointing given the high level of public interest in the shortage of social housing in the District.

### **East Cambs Street Scene**

Following the damning report from the Council's Chief Executive into the Council's own in-house company East Cambs Street Scene, changes have been made to the composition of the company Board to address the most obvious failures of governance at the company.

These amendments include a requirement to put in place a formal escalation process to oblige ECSS to report overspends or underspends to the Council's Operational Services Committee within an agreed parameter; and the implementation of revised Key Performance Indicators.

Charlotte proposed an amendment to these proposals, on the grounds that

- The proposed escalation process contradicts the Shareholder Agreement, which requires that the Company will maintain effective and appropriate control systems in relation to the financial, accounting and record-keeping functions of the Company, and provide to the Shareholder full details of any actual or prospective material change in the Business or the financial position or affairs of the Company, as soon as such details are available.
- The revised Key Performance Indicators should be reviewed by the Council's Operational Services Committee.
- The revised Risk Register is a cause for concern, with a high risk of ECSS failing to deliver on its business plan or to deliver a cost effective, sustainable and high quality domestic waste collection and street cleansing service.
- The Chief Executive should be instructed to commission a fully independent review of the governance of ECSS.

This amendment was defeated. We are concerned by the apparent complacency of the Council's leadership in the light of these serious issues.

### **Local Plan single issue review**

At its Full Council meeting in October, the district council approved the 'single issue review of its local plan. The review was commissioned three years ago, and has now completed its examination by a Planning Inspector. It is a very limited review, with a number of 'take it or leave it' recommendations.

This Council's Local Plan is now eight and a half years old. If it were a human being it would be in junior school by now. We have consistently argued that this Council should have embarked on a more significant update of the Plan a long time ago. The current Plan has failed to protect residents from inappropriate development in several locations across the District, and it is now hopelessly out of date in the face of the threat of climate change.

The introduction of a standard national method to determine a local housing need gives a housing requirement of 5,398 for the nine years from 2022 to 2031.

Added to the approximately 3,600 dwellings completed in the eleven years from 2011 to 2022, this will mean a total figure of around 9,000 new dwellings in East Cambridgeshire between 2011 and 2031.

In order to achieve this, the rate of house building completions will need to increase very significantly indeed, from an average 419 a year over the past twenty years, to 600 a year for the next nine years. The Planning Inspector said:

“There is under delivery of 2,688 dwellings in the plan period to date against the adopted housing requirement. Despite the Council identifying a potential housing land supply (untested in this examination) of 7,371 dwellings to 2031, the delivery of the housing requirement in full for the plan period as a whole, including the under provision, would require a significant increase in the annual delivery of dwellings from historic levels, and over a prolonged period.”

At least as important as the number of homes is their affordability. The Inspector says: “The evidence suggests that there would have to be a significant uplift in housing provision for the identified affordable housing need to be met in full.”

As the cost of living crisis continues to squeeze thousands of local households, the news from this limited review is that East Cambridgeshire residents should prepare for an increase of around 50% in the rate of house building, which will fail to meet the needs of our area for affordable houses. That is a challenge the Council needs to face up to in the remaining years of the Plan.

### **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

Once again, the leadership of the District Council voted down a proposal from the opposition to reduce to zero the level of Council Tax paid by the very worst-off households in East Cambridgeshire.

While the cost of living crisis continues to push more and more families into poverty, a temporary respite from Council Tax bills would have been a welcome help, and a sign of support from the Council in difficult times. Furthermore, the cost to the Council of £24,345.76 to adopt a minimum contribution of zero could be less than the cost of pursuing irrecoverable debts for Council Tax.

### **Meet your councillors**

Our next surgery will take place on Monday 20 November 6:30-7:30PM in Swaffham Prior Village Hall. Residents can continue to contact us by email, or phone