

Bassingbourn Parish Council 12 December 2023 – District and County Councillor Report

Local Highways Improvement application prospects

As you know, over the summer a visit with Highways officers took place to assess a potential new walking and crossing route to primary school. The proposal looked to make use of the footway along Brook Road on the northwest side, by connecting to it from a new stretch of footway along North End (west side) from about number 2, and then a road crossing along Brook Road at around the point of number 9. Detailed costs were obtained and are very high.

There are two impediments to the parish council applying for the next LHI round, deadline January 12. First, a public consultation on the proposal needs to have taken place but has not. Second, the maximum that the County Council can provide to any one scheme is £25K. The total for the LHI taking the lower cost option (tactile rather than Zebra crossing) is £57,550, so the Parish Council would need to come up with £32K.

It has been useful in my view to identify detailed options for road crossings, because legally permissible opportunities are extremely limited – the geometry of the road is fundamentally difficult.

If the PC does want to plan on taking something like this plan forward in the future, a consultation needs to be planned and funding strategy worked out. Other parish councils have done expensive LHIs with forward planning, the nearest example being Whaddon's A1198 application.

Privately Funded Highways Improvement – Spring Lane etc.

Some questions came back on the Parish Council's application, which I have answered. I have now received instructions on next steps and will bring details to the Dec 12 parish council meeting.

Kneesworth roundabouts road markings

I can only apologize for the delay. We had to compete for limited funds (first battle); this was successful in that the job is classed as 'mandatory' so will happen, however no date has yet been assigned. I am chasing and our Local Highways Officer is chasing too - I hope to have more information soon.

Gulley cleaning

Bassingbourn gulley cleaning is due to be happening now though at the last check it was still pending.

New County Council volunteer driving scheme for helping children and young people get to education – important for Bassingbourn

A new community transport type scheme has been initiated and will hopefully be able to make a difference to families struggling with transport to school. It's a particular issue for post-16s in Bassingbourn as there is no statutory requirement for councils to provide post-16 education and training transport assistance.

[Volunteer for the Passenger Transport Service - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

Permits for Royston and Thriplow Recycling Centres in reciprocal county agreement

Following work to arrive at an arrangement for out-of-county residents to use Royston and Thriplow Recycling Centres, a permit system has been initiated for Herts residents to use Thriplow and Cambs residents to use Royston. This is a simple on-line form:

[Change to access at Royston and Thriplow Recycling Centres - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

South Cambs Policing Survey – on-line public meetings, setting Police priorities, and top reported crimes in Bassingbourn ward:

A reminder that South Cambs Police hold a quarterly on-line public meeting – please follow the link for next meeting notices (awaiting next round to be announced)

You will also find a survey of concerns in your area which helps establish Police priorities for South Cambs. Please do fill out the survey if you have concerns. No input from any particular area sends a message too.

The type of reported crime of the highest rate is violence and sexual offences – this information is published, also on this link.

[South Cambridgeshire | Cambridgeshire Constabulary \(cambs.police.uk\)](#)

DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCIL NEWS

Corporate Peer Review of South Cambs District Council

This took place in the first week of November and the review results clearly state that the council is in a strong financial position and is a well-managed organisation with an enviable record of delivery - such as being the district with the highest number of visas issued under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The 4 Day Week is helping the council to retain and recruit planners needed to respond to the Government's own vision for this area in terms of growth.

Best Value Notice and 4 Day Week Trial

South Cambridgeshire District Councillors have agreed the Council will answer up to 80 questions totalling 186 individual requests from Government every week, as the four-day week trial continues. This is a result of the minister at the time, Lee Rowley issuing the council with a Best Value Notice.

Notices of this type have been issued to three other local government bodies this year - but for concerns such as an unrealistic budget, significant governance weaknesses and major cultural problems. None of these apply to South Cambs which is in a strong financial position and is acknowledged to be well run and high performing.

A three-month trial of a four-day week for desk-based staff began in January this year as the Council tried to address critical recruitment and retention issues facing local government. These issues are particularly acute in South Cambridgeshire due to the strength of the local economy and high cost of living. Following independent analysis which showed performance was generally maintained, with nine areas showing substantial improvement on the previous year, that trial was extended until the end of March 2024 to assess recruitment and retention benefits over a longer term.

The Council has maintained its full opening hours, so they are at least the same as before the trial, and now stays open to the public later on Wednesdays.

The Best Value Notice requests the Council provides the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) with extensive data on a weekly basis for the next six months. This covers staffing, costs, service delivery, performance, and resident feedback.

At an Extraordinary Council meeting last month councillors heard that staff turnover and staff sickness was down, and recruitment had seen clear benefits with almost 100 new staff joining the Council this year. The performance of services across the board during the trial was encouraging – including in the waste service, which has recently joined the trial and is seeing more than 99% of bins collected on-time every week. Thanks to the improvement in recruitment, the amount expected to be spent on agency staff cover this year is hundreds of thousands of pounds lower than it would otherwise have been.

SCDC has received strong support from other local authorities across the political spectrum, including all five Suffolk district councils, Central Beds and SCDC's partner in Shared Services Cambridge City Council.

South Cambs District Council Finances

The latest audit is being signed off at a time when the vast majority of councils are behind on the audit due to big problems with the capacity of the auditors we are required to use. The joint planning service (Cambridge City and South Cambs) is reporting that its spending is close to budget - whereas this time last year it was £250,000 over. We were assured that this was due entirely to the benefits of the 4 Day Week trial which has meant that we have recruited into a significant number of planning roles which had been notoriously difficult to fill and very expensive to use agency staff to fill.

Shared Prosperity Fund

South Cambs will receive over £1m from this government scheme to allocate as grants to business and community schemes. We are currently discussing how big these grants could be (probably up to £100k) and what sort of schemes we should be targeting.

Cambridge 2040

Cambridge 2040 is Michael Gove's vision for significant employment and housing growth in Greater Cambridge. There was not much in the Autumn statement about it other than fairly modest sums of money for retrofitting water efficiency into existing houses and some money for enhanced planning services. We think we know that there is £3m to set up a Cambridge office to work up the scheme. There was mention of a possible Development Corporation but we have no reason to believe that this is definitely the route they are taking. They will obviously need to consider it as one of a number of delivery models but there are many reasons why it is not the best. There is a small amount of money over 2 years which will go to the joint planning service.

South Cambs Hall

Like most local authorities South Cambs District Council now encourages hybrid/home working which means that large offices are no longer needed in the way they once were. We have therefore moved all of our staff onto the first floor of the Cambourne offices and are converting the ground floor as space for businesses and community groups to conduct their businesses and hold events. It is hoped that this will encourage new start-up new business as well as helping existing businesses through a programme of support events as well as networking. The new space will be open on 24th April 2024.

Old Shire Hall

The old HQ for the County Council was to have been converted into a hotel by property developers Brookgate. They have now withdrawn from the deal on financial grounds so work has re-started on finding a use for the building in Cambridge.

Parking Enforcement in South Cambs

New Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) powers in South Cambridgeshire will be given to Cambridgeshire County Council following Parliamentary approval.

Earlier this year an application was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) to enable Council Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to issue Penalty Charge Notices for the majority of on-street offences such as parking on double or single yellow lines. Previously only the Police could do this.

Benefits are expected to include increased compliance with parking restrictions which in turn would improve traffic flow, road safety and lead to a reduction in obstructive and dangerous parking. It will also support economic growth in the district.

Following the decision by Government, the CPE scheme in South Cambridgeshire will officially come into effect on 19 December. To give people notice and a chance to find a more suitable parking place, information has now begun to be placed on vehicles that are parked in some areas where parking is in the greatest demand, such as commuting and shopping areas.

A Warning Notice will be issued to people who continue to park where there are restrictions throughout January – this looks like a parking ticket but there is no fine attached. Penalty Charge Notices will be issued from 1 February which will mean a fine of between £50 and £70, depending on the severity of the offence.

Streetlights switchover on the way

A project to switch its streetlights to newer, more efficient LED lights is expected to begin in 2024 and will involve replacing 47,500 streetlights with LED lanterns. This will take two years to complete. The works should cause minimal disruption to residents, with no impact on roads or footpaths. Each unit should take about one hour to replace. The Council will share the proposed installation dates for each area before the start of the works and will publish this information on its web site. The Council's street lighting service provider, Balfour Beatty Living Places, will also provide information on its own web site. Questions can be addressed to Street.Lighting@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Holiday activities and food

This Christmas, the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is offering free spaces for children in Cambridgeshire who are eligible for free school meals, to enjoy enriching experiences and nutritious food. Approximately 19,000 HAF eligibility vouchers have been sent to families. These vouchers offer sixteen hours of access, for no charge, to a HAF scheme this Christmas, subject to availability. Each session will include a nutritious meal, a variety of exciting activities or sports and the opportunity to socialise with other children.

The HAF scheme is part of the County Council's 'Be Winter Wise' campaign, which draws together a range of services, activities and offers, keeping communities across Cambridgeshire informed and prepared to stay safe and healthy during the winter months of 2023 and 2024. Subject to availability

of places, any child receiving benefit-related free school meals is eligible for the programme. The programme will run from 21 December to 3 January, except for bank holidays.

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE), the scheme enables councils to coordinate free holiday childcare and enriching experiences locally. The programme will be delivered by approved providers, co-ordinated by Cambridgeshire County Council. The Council is working with schools, childcare providers and voluntary and community organisations to deliver the programme.

Further information at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/holiday-activities-and-food-programme

Teenage fostering appeal In Cambridgeshire

There are currently more than 400 young people in the 12-18 age range who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to continue living with their birth families. These young people would benefit hugely from the invaluable experience of people who have raised teenagers and supported them on their journey to independence. When you foster with the Cambridgeshire Fostering Service, you will receive:

- generous allowances and carer perks
- an individualised training programme tailored to your needs
- round-the-clock support
- a dedicated, skilled and experienced Supervising Social Worker

If you are over 21 years of age, have a spare bedroom, and believe you have the qualities and skills to become a compassionate, resilient foster carer, please get in touch. Facebook at @CCCFosteringService Online at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-andfamilies/fostering-and-adoption Phone 0800 052 0078

Childminding careers

From the County Council: Are you interested in working in a profession which would enable you to work in your own home and continue to care for your own children, whilst providing quality care for children of working parents? If so Registered Childminding may be the profession for you. To help with starting your childminding business the Government are currently offering a grant of £600 towards your set up costs. We hold regular information evenings about childminding which are free to attend. If you are interested in finding out more please e-mail childminding@cambridgeshire.gov.uk for more information or call 01223 714657.

Chancellor's autumn statement

Cambridgeshire County Council leaders have expressed disappointment about the lack of any additional funding for local government in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement.

Councils like Cambridgeshire have been underfunded for many years by central government, and central government are again asking for more growth without recognising the costs that brings: the need to provide more schools and more care for our growing older population.

A previously announced £2.3million over the next two years for highways improvements in Cambridgeshire is helpful, but it's a drop in the ocean of the need for investment in our highways network. Soaring inflation in highway maintenance costs, alongside the impact of climate change on

our 4500 miles of roads, 37% of which are affected by peat damage due to extreme weather events, have left us with a huge challenge to simply stand still on keeping our roads safe. Like the Local Government Association said over the weekend, we need highways funding to be over a minimum of five years—as has been offered to National Highways.

We've already seen applications to our household support fund reach their highest ever levels this summer, compared to the same time last year.

National concern at council funding challenges

County councils across the country have warned of the risk of major budget overspends due to 'uncontrollable' pressures, and fear that even well-managed councils are 'running out of road to prevent insolvency'.

The County Councils Network (CCN) says all frontline council services are being affected, with increasing demand for care services amongst vulnerable children and a rise in the cost of placing children in care leading to spiralling costs.

- £319 million of the projected £639 million national overspend by county councils this year comes from children's services.
- One in ten 'well-managed' councils are unsure whether they are able to balance their budget this year, which is a legal requirement. This figure is expected to rise to four in ten for next year, and then six in ten for 2025. The overall funding deficit is anticipated to reach £4 billion up to 2026, regardless of the £2 billion worth of savings and cuts that councils are planning to make in order to prevent the issuing of a 'Section 114 Notice' (the local government equivalent of bankruptcy).