

Apologies for the absence of a report for July. I was extremely busy with the General Election campaign, and many meetings were cancelled reducing the amount of business to report on.

ASSETS & PROCUREMENT

Old Shire Hall

The County Council's Assets & Procurement Committee has agreed to enter into an exclusive arrangement with a preferred bidder for a freehold sale of the old Shire Hall building in Cambridge. The move comes after the previous preferred bidder pulled out of a proposal for a leasehold arrangement, and a new marketing exercise was undertaken. The Committee also agreed to make arrangements in the event that contracts are not exchanged by 9 October.

Council-owned companies

The Committee has also agreed to establish arrangements for strengthened oversight of companies in which the council has an interest as owner, and to recommend the council's Constitution & Ethics Committee to establish a shareholder sub-committee to consider how this should be done.

COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION (COSMIC)

Household Support Fund

In April 2024, Cambridgeshire County Council was granted further funding (£3,580k) to support households in need and help with the rising cost of living. The Joint Administration had committed to underwriting the holiday support scheme if funding had been cut as the outgoing Government had planned. The scheme has experienced significant demand, with large numbers of applications being submitted every day both directly and through partners. It has proved a very effective way to ensure children have access to a range of activities and also a nutritious meal during holiday periods.

The new government has continued the HSF which the county will use in part to continue supporting the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. We are awaiting further decisions by the DfE to see what government support will be available, which allows the county to use its funds towards a number of other anti-poverty measures for which there is little funding.

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Wisbech incinerator

Fenland District Council's application requesting judicial review of the Government's decision to grant planning permission was unsuccessful.

Sunnica

The outgoing Government delayed making a decision on the Sunnica solar farm application on 4 occasions but the new Government approved the application in its first few days, despite the recommendation of the Examining Authority that it should be refused. The objector group and the 'host authorities' (Suffolk and Cambridgeshire counties, West Suffolk and East Cambridgeshire

districts) have been considering their responses.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Weed treatment

The County Council's chemical weed treatment programme is under way, within built-up areas in villages and towns with a 40MPH limit or below. Treatment will take place twice a year as a minimum.

Chemical weed treatment is applied directly to any weeds in the gullies of roads and at the back of footways abutting a building, wall, or fence line. A period of about three to five weeks is typically required for the weed treatment to take effect. After this, road sweepers are deployed to remove dead weeds. A second programme of treatment will take place in October. This will help to get the weeds under control before the next growing season.

Seven areas of the county have confirmed that they do not wish to be part of the chemical weed treatment programme, so they have been excluded. The County Council is working with these areas—Cambridge, Caxton, Duxford, Lolworth, Morborne, Burwell, and Girton—to appropriately support their alternative treatment regimes.

Highways capital maintenance programme 2024-25

Much effort was put into increasing the funding available for highways maintenance this year. It recognizes the fact that historical underfunding of roads, coupled with climate change, will accelerate road deterioration, for example increased potholes and flooding. Highways is also being reorganized and improved with many staff changes being required as well as necessary systems improvements. The allocation of maintenance funding and funding of specific maintenance initiatives should be based on a clear allocation principle of need but for too long the allocation principles have been somewhat obscure. This needs to change and there is a strong desire to be more transparent. As a result a report has gone to Parishes citing additional funding but much of the work programme has not been agreed yet and therefore not yet available online. But there is more funding available and many issues are in the process of being worked up for approval. It is hoped there will be more information available soon.

Maintenance work on old A14

Important maintenance work is beginning on the A1307, known locally as the old A14, between Swavesey and Huntingdon.

Since the County Council took over responsibility for the road from National Highways in February, there has been a temporary 40MPH speed limit in place between Fenstanton and St Ives due to safety concerns. The road has been inspected and drainage works are needed here. From 29 July one lane will be closed in each direction for these works. They are expected to take four weeks and the lane closures will be in place 24/7 on both the eastbound and westbound carriageway. Once this is complete at the end of August, if the work has been successful, the 40MPH speed limit on this section will be removed. Meanwhile the Godmanchester to Huntingdon section is currently restricted to a temporary 40MPH speed limit due to safety concerns with the barriers. The council expects to start work on the barriers on Sunday 15 September. This will also involve lane closures in both directions and the work is expected to take three months to complete. In the meantime, the 40MPH speed limit will remain in place for safety reasons.

Road resurfacing works will also be taking place overnight along the A1307 from 27 August onwards, for a period of three weeks, weather permitting, in a variety of locations. Road closures will be necessary, and signed diversion routes will be in place. All this work is being co-ordinated, and will be done together wherever possible to minimise disruption.

LOCAL ISSUES

Acknowledging and addressing A14 legacy issues

There continue to be ongoing 'legacy issues' from the A14 project, which persist and for which there is no local funding to address. For example, derelict buildings in Bar Hill, lost public rights of way and excessive motorway noise in Girton, local road damage caused by the works in Dry Drayton (making the road more prone to flooding and potholes), the cavalier reneging on funding a dozen cyclepaths which had been promised (including one in Dry Drayton), defective structures (such as the sinking overbridge in Bar Hill) which the council does not have funding to address. There were also promises made about there being net biodiversity gain from the project, and planting 860k trees along the new road. The outgoing minister signed off the A14 project as 'finished' but we have significant 'unfinished business' which includes, not least, evidence that the A14 project did in fact deliver net biodiversity gain, will in fact ensure the A14 trees thrive, and are held to account in relation to the other areas of damage, broken promises and defects. I am working with officers to address the A14 legacy, including acknowledging formally that there are outstanding problems for our area and seeking to raise the issues at a national level.

Active travel (cycling, walking, wheeling, links to public transport)

The council is putting together surveys (online and paper) which will enable us to have data about potential demand for active travel and non motorized links to public transport and the barriers residents experience currently. One is planned for the Bar Hill area ie Bar Hill, Dry Drayton and Madingley as there are in the short term potential improvements possible by making more of the links between the areas and also addressing concerns – for example the lack of off road cycling links in Bar Hill (which could be a joined up path around the ring road for example) or improvements to the unsafe and unsightly barriers in Madingley and the impact of the road closure there. It is hoped the survey will be taken county wide, and feed into the council's efforts to map a non motorized travel network which is as important as the road network.

Drainage work in Dry Drayton

Following a walkabout with the Chief Executive of the County Council, and the Director of Maintenance, there has been progress on some fronts (although there is still more to do).

Scotland Road, I attended the site meeting with the resident and officers (Dennis Vacher and Jon Clarke) to confirm the option of placing end caps on the system and using a culvert under the carriageway to direct excess water away from the properties that have experienced flooding issues. There is now due a site meeting between the drainage team and contractor to discuss works processes. A TTRO has been applied for as a road closure will be required for the works which will take place during the autumn.

Park Lane, works had been booked for 17th June for the system to be jetted and cleansed but this

did not happen. Since then the jetting and CCTV works have been carried out along Park Lane and officers have received the report back and will be reviewing this properly next week. They want to identify where the system outfalls and if there is any further works required to the surface water system. They will update us after they have considered the report.

Park Street, the landowner has been shown CCTV evidence and Barry Whyllie's team is working to clear the blockage on the landowner's property. The drainage team has carried out jetting works along Park Street and the system appears to be going into a ditch which needs clearing out. The officers have spoken to colleagues in Flood and Water and asked them to assist in liaising with the adjacent landowner to get this cleaned out. The officers promise to keep us informed of progress.

New Local Highways Officer

We have a new LHO – Sarah Bligh. She is joining the parish meeting on Thursday at Bar Hill to introduce herself. She has very relevant experience, having been a district and parish councillor before in another part of this county, and so has engaged extensively with County highways from a councillor's and resident's point of view. The previous LHO – Sarah Budd – has moved to work (still within the council) nearer her home which would help her greatly. There is a team approach within the LHOs so there has been handover and our previous LHOs are on hand to provide the 'new' Sarah with help, advice and support.

It is hoped the next report will have more detailed information about Dry Drayton highways maintenance issues.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Combined Authority Board has decided to proceed with proposals and consultation for a bus franchising scheme, in the hope of improving bus services in Cambridgeshire. There is a 'Better Buses Bill', the details of which will be known when the bill is laid before Parliament. But it seems that it will seek to extend the power to franchise to areas in the country which do not have a Mayor ie will not necessarily affect our area. However it is hoped that there will be more powers and opportunities to improve the quantity – and crucially the quality – of bus services in the County as they are currently appalling. Many residents are desperate for improvements to public transport.

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