

FULL COUNCIL

Motions agreed

The council debated four motions proposed by councillors, and agreed them all unanimously.

One motion sought to influence planning processes in cases where schemes are delivered over many years yet planning designs and decisions are not able to be changed to accommodate new situations. Members identified many examples where anachronistic planning requirements undermined designs for cycle paths and other amenities which were wanted but thwarted by the current system that did not allow flexibility.

One was a call for fairer police funding and awareness of domestic abuse. Cambridgeshire is the fourth lowest funded police force in the country, and local taxpayers fund around half of Cambridgeshire's policing budget. The picture is similar for all public services as there is a 'growth penalty' for those areas experiencing faster population growth than anticipated by the national funding formula. The Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue service for example is the second lowest funded fire service in the country. While still managing to be effective it is hugely challenging to do so.

Another was put forward about the safety risks from lithium-ion batteries in items such as e-bikes and e-scooters, for householders and for waste collection and disposal crews. It endorses the work being done by Lord Foster and the charity Electrical Safety First to seek to ensure third party independent approval testing for these items entering the UK market, regulations for safe disposal of used lithium-ion batteries, and controls to address specific fire concerns such as charging points. I endorsed the motion on behalf of the Fire Authority, which has done a great deal in terms of lobbying (as the fundamental issue is the need for legislation and regulation in this area) as well as education (in schools, encouraging safe disposal of batteries).

I proposed a motion to conduct a proper review of the aftermath of National Highways' project on the A14 so that issues are clear and can be fully documented, and calling for National Highways to be more responsive and to begin to work to resolve outstanding matters. Many of the problems were to do with poor construction and delivery of defective infrastructure – for example the sinking A14 overbridge, and various parts of the A1307 where the road is not in a good enough condition for the county to adopt it without further work, and much more. Other the outstanding matters currently identified are:

- Promises which were reneged upon eg a dozen villages including Dry Drayton were told they would have cyclepaths but the promise was dropped during the project lifetime with no explanation
- Problems were left behind with no solution eg local roads in S Cambs were left in poor condition due to damage from the construction work itself but without a long term plan for proper maintenance, the landlocked derelict buildings in Bar Hill will remain in situ unless there is some sort of intervention
- There were numerous other problems. For example in Girton PROW were lost and not compensated for, and noise levels from the new road are very high but residents' concerns have been dismissed. In Histon a pedestrian crossing which was lost and an active travel design for a roundabout which needs to be re-done. There are problems all over the project's area of operation.
- A major issue is that there was supposed to be biodiversity net gain but this promise seems to have been abandoned. Much was made initially of the scheme's planned biodiversity net gain, of which the 860k trees was meant to be a significant part. But many trees have died, it is not clear their revised tree strategy is working, and there is no evidence that there has been

biodiversity net gain – in fact a recent post project evaluation claims there is biodiversity net loss and that this was expected all along. Residents need to have the full facts on this.

The intention is that the County council will be proactive in engaging national bodies – National Highways, the Minister and MPs – to start to get more information and support, to start to address these issues. The council also needed to capture all examples of problematic legacy issues, and try to consider whether there was any way in which these problems could be avoided in future.

Other business

The council also agreed to:

- Apply to Government for a Transport & Works Act Order to progress the Cambridge South East Transport project for a busway between a new travel hub near the A1307 / A11 and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, connecting with Granta Park, and the villages in between. The law requires the support of a majority of the whole council to proceed, regardless of how many are present, so a minimum of 31 votes; the proposal passed with 33 votes in favour and fifteen against.
- Establish a new Shareholder Sub-Committee of the council's Assets & Procurement Committee, to improve governance and accountability where the council is a shareholder with a significant holding.

STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES

Quality of Life Survey

Most Cambridgeshire residents continue to feel happy and safe in the county, well connected to their local communities, and believe it's a great place to raise children, according to the County Council's second annual Quality of Life survey.

However, cost of living remains the issue of most concern, with almost half of residents using less heating, and a quarter cutting back on nutritious food in the past twelve months.

The survey was commissioned from national independent market research agency Think Insights. This year the council carried out this work in partnership with Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority, South Cambridgeshire District Council, and Cambridge Ahead. 5,500 residents took part in the survey—1,100 in each of Cambridgeshire's five districts to give a representative view across the county.

In addition to the survey, this year the council engaged with some specific groups including those with lived experience of homelessness, the criminal justice system and drug or alcohol dependency as well as those under the age of 18. A general online public survey allowed any resident to take part.

The council will use the survey to increase its understanding of what is important to local residents and to inform council decisions. In numbers:

- 72% of residents have high or very high levels of happiness. The average happiness score was 7.21, higher than the national average 7.0.
- Residents continue to feel positively about their local community; 85% feel safe and 75% feel they belong.
- Fewer residents report struggling with mental health this year (37% down to 29%) and a lower proportion report issues with physical health (40% down to 31%).
- Significant numbers of young people (43% of 25–34-year-olds and 40% of 18–24-year-olds) continue to be more likely to report mental health struggles.

- The proportion of residents reporting that they often feel lonely remains higher than national data, at 31% of residents.
- Younger residents are again more likely to report loneliness (53% of 18-24 year olds).
- Cost of living remains residents' highest concern, with 87% of residents concerned this year.

The budget

The council's current position forecasts an overspend of £9.6M for the current financial year—that's 2% of its budget. The county council's estimated budget gap for next year (2025/26) has increased from £23.5M to more than £39M, largely due to a combination of increasing demand for services, inflationary pressures, and uncertainty over future funding from Government.

Over the last ten years, the council's core government funding has reduced by 70% in real terms. Combined with more steep rises in inflation and a surge in demand for services supporting some of our most vulnerable residents, this has added further cost pressures to the council.

BE WINTER WISE

Be Winter Wise returns for the winter season, helping Cambridgeshire residents keep warm, safe and healthy throughout the colder months.

The focus of the campaign is on preventing winter illnesses, coping with the cost of living, and staying safe during the winter weather. It will provide practical help and guidance with the issues that face so many people at this time of year.

The Cambridgeshire County Council led campaign will have advice on:

- Help with the cost of living such as warm hubs and Pension Credit
- Ways to protect your health, including vaccinations
- Tips on how to heat your home efficiently
- Where to find free physical activities for all the family
- Advice on preparing for extreme weather, such as freezing and flooding
- Winter gritting schedules and staying safe on our roads

Supermarket vouchers will once again be available for children eligible for free school meals during the school holidays, and the council will be signposting to partner organisations who provide essential winter support. Social media posts will feature campaign motif Olly the Owl.

ADULTS & HEALTH

Health scrutiny

The county council's Adults & Health Committee commissions public health services from drug and alcohol treatment and wellness checks to vaccinations— but it also scrutinises NHS health care.

The Rosie

At their recent meeting, the committee received a report on maternity services at the Rosie in Cambridge. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspected two 'domains' (*Safe* and *Well Led*) at the Rosie in May 2023. Safe care was rated as 'Requires Improvement', with Well Led receiving 'Good'. The CQC issued one 'must do' and '13' should do actions.

The report covered developments in training, staffing, wait times, and the CQC's finding that 'Maternity

staff felt respected, but did not always feel supported and valued'. It also considered how service user feedback was encouraged and used to influence improvement, and how the Rosie benefits from and shares learning.

Hinchingbrooke redevelopment

The committee also heard an update on plans to provide a new hospital on the existing Hinchingbrooke Hospital site by 2030. Work has begun to develop an outline business case and the programme currently remains on track to open the new hospital in late autumn 2030.

ASSETS & PROCUREMENT

The council's Assets and Procurement Committee has voted to close five county council offices and invest in other council office accommodation.

The plans will generate capital savings of nearly £11M over the next two years, with much of that reinvested in council buildings including community facilities. This decision will help continue to shrink the council's carbon footprint, and deliver around £2M in annual savings.

These closures are the first phase in the council's Accommodation Improvement Programme. This project has reviewed under-used council offices throughout the county where the average occupancy is less than 25% across the working week—part of the Joint Administration's drive for value for money.

COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION

Poverty Strategy Commission

A new commission involving organisations from across Cambridgeshire has been launched to tackle poverty in the county.

The Cambridgeshire Poverty Strategy Commission will work independently to make recommendations to partners across the county who are supporting people currently in, or at risk of, poverty.

- A group of eleven independent commissioners with extensive professional experience supporting residents will:
- look at data and evidence relating to poverty in Cambridgeshire and how the system currently responds to this
- hear from residents who have personally experienced poverty
- produce a series of recommendations for local organisations to consider as an approach to recognising and tackling poverty.

The commission will meet regularly and determine what it will focus on within the timescales. It will deliver a report in early 2025 which will include a review of the evidence submitted and a set of recommendations.

Pension Credit

A campaign has been launched to make sure everyone who is eligible for Pension Credit in Cambridgeshire is claiming it.

Pension Credit is extra money to help with living costs for those over State Pension age and on a low income. It could mean an extra £186 per month for the average household.

In Cambridgeshire as many as one in three people who are eligible for Pension Credit may not be claiming it. Cambridgeshire County Council is appealing to everyone who may be eligible to check.

Claiming Pension Credit can also unlock other benefits, such as the Winter Fuel Payment, a free TV licence for those aged over 75, help with NHS dental treatment, glasses and hospital transport costs and other benefits depending on circumstances.

Pensioners can get a Winter Fuel Payment this year if they are entitled to Pension Credit at any point between 16 and 22 September 2024.

To be eligible for Pension Credit, you must:

- live in the UK
- be over State Pension age
- have a weekly income below £218.15 if you're single, or £332.95 if you're part of a couple.

The county council has set up a dedicated webpage with advice, guidance, and links to Government websites where people can check if they are eligible and apply for Pension Credit
<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/pension-credit>

Road closures for Remembrance events

The council has agreed to produce a toolkit to raise awareness of the support available from the Council for those organising Remembrance events. This consists of waiving the fee for any Temporary Traffic Regulation Order, and providing access to free training for traffic management volunteers.

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

East West Rail consultation

East West Rail (EWR) have announced that their Non-Statutory Consultation will begin on 14 November 2024, closing on 24 January 2025. More information, including details of consultation events, can be found at <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation2024>

LOCAL NEWS

Surveys

The County council is embarking on an **active travel survey** to identify what barriers there are for residents in considering doing more walking, wheeling, or cycling. The path linking Dry Drayton and Bar Hill is an important part of this – for both residents in Dry Drayton and Bar Hill, and so it is hoped that residents in Dry Drayton will also be interested in taking part. The work will form an evidence base to support further cycling and walking improvements so it would be helpful to fill it in if possible. The link is here:

[Bar Hill Active Travel Survey | Consult Cambridgeshire](#)

We are hoping to encourage as many residents as possible to complete our **general residents' survey** currently live throughout Bar Hill Division, which will provide us with valuable information about issues and concerns on a wide range of issues. It's being delivered across the division currently, but also is available on line if people want to complete it:

[Bar Hill - South Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats](#)

Drainage team update

44a Pettitt's Lane (water escape) – this was inspected and it was found that the gully drains into the ditch that runs along the edge of the property. There is a public footpath the other side of the ditch and the land is unregistered. The resident has recently cut back vegetation within the ditch as he had his perimeter fence repaired. There had been a misunderstanding of the responsibility to maintain the ditch but given the lack of a registered owner on the north side the landowner was happy to do this in the future to ensure it kept his property safe from flooding.

Run off from field (drain investigation) - The drainage team met the Landowners some time ago and since then there

have been no regular updates. I understand that staff are on sick leave but I have raised this once again with the director of maintenance who is due to provide me with an update on Tuesday.

Flooding responses generally – the director of maintenance is going to take an experience of flooding from Dry Drayton, and the processes for addressing it, as a case study to ensure that there is a proper flooding response protocol. It will have guidance for councillors as well as residents – who to call, what the services are etc. The current set up is full of single points of failure and leaves residents and councillors without back up.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me on: edna.murphy@hotmail.co.uk

Cllr Edna Murphy

County Councillor for the Bar Hill division