

## **Meldreth Parish Council November 2020 - District and County Councillor Report**

### **Local:**

**Meldreth Flood Avoidance sub-committee:** Following our recent tour of Meldreth, together with Cllr Gilmore we propose a refresh on communication to the village on riparian ownership responsibilities and the common-sense importance of keeping all ditches and watercourses properly maintained, for the sake of the overall system. There are one or two sites we'd like to visit again to understand any need for action.

**Drains:** As previously reported, County Council is no longer doing 'routine gulley maintenance' – i.e. not clearing drains on a regular scheduled basis. That this is the case is a matter of deep concern: our drains, roads, pavements and other elements of highways infrastructure are in a state of 'managed decline' with nowhere near the funds needed to bring them up to an acceptable standard. This year an already stretched workforce has been further challenged by the secondment of a number of staff to Covid response. The upshot is a system that's not working properly. Susan is working with officers to take forward parish concerns. Sadly the financial situation is not expected to improve (see below). And, a new major redeployment of staff to the Covid Hub and to the vaccination effort is about to take place.

Thanks to everyone who's been reporting faults on the County website, which is important to do for the sake of establishing a public record.

<https://highwaysreporting.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/>

### **Path to Meldreth Station**

We are working with County and District Council officers and Govia Thameslink Railway now that the Melbourn Science Park S106 contribution has been activated, adding to the New Road Melbourn housing development contribution. This will be a challenging but important project for a much-needed improved access to Meldreth Station, for an upgraded path and a new ramp to the London platform which is currently accessible only by stairs. There are of course other components of accessibility challenge at Meldreth Station and these continued to be pursued

### **'Nottingham Knockers'**

We have been asked to disseminate the following: 'Recently received reports that 'Nottingham Knockers' have been operating in different areas of the county. Nottingham Knockers are traders who sell items from a bag on the doorstep, typically cleaning products such as dusters, sprays etc. They usually tell a story that they are former prisoners who are rehabilitating themselves and getting back into work in order to appeal to residents' emotions and get them to purchase their wares.

Items are usually overpriced and often just shy of ten pounds each so that if anyone does agree to buy, they have to find a note to pay. This helps criminals to identify addresses where cash may be kept in the house and therefore prime targets for future distraction burglaries and other crimes. Please spread the word about this to any vulnerable people you may know and please remind them that it is quite acceptable not to answer the door to cold callers.'

### **CambsCounty Council**

#### **Next year's budget**

Depending on how the Covid battle goes, the County Council will need to find savings of between £40-82M in the financial year starting next April. Unless there is more cash coming Cambridgeshire's way, the options available to the Council will mainly be 'efficiency savings', cuts to services, increased fees and charges, commercial investments, and council tax.

Commercial investments are not working so well at the moment - the money put into buying student accommodation in Cambridge and leisure facilities in Wisbech isn't making good returns during the pandemic.

Government has announced a council tax rise ceiling of 3% for Adult Social Care and 2% for a general rise. Indications are that administration councillors are favouring an increase of 2% in council tax for adult social care (a service facing huge increases in need), and 0% council tax increase for general services.

The Council administration has been vocal in recent years about not raising council tax, but at the same time squeezing budgets, which impacts services including for people who are vulnerable. The Council is now approaching Government to ask for more financial support. Government will want to see the Council doing all it can to bridge its own gap, including a general council tax rise.

### **South Cambs District Council**

#### **Electric Bin Lorry**

SCDC is very pleased to finally be trailing a new electric bin lorry with a view to gradually exchanging the whole fleet of refuse vehicles as part of its work to become a zero carbon authority.

#### **South Cambs DC Planning Service**

The District Council has been working very hard to improve the new shared planning service between South Cambs and Cambridge City. Things are moving well in the right direction and the processes are getting quicker and more efficient. There is now have one, streamlined validation process for both authorities which has successfully conquered the historic backlog. The team are now working toward reaching the target of 5 days to validate an application.

#### **New Business Grants**

Businesses premises forced to close as a result of CV restrictions are to be eligible for government grants of up to £3000 per month. To be eligible you have to be paying business rates but we are expecting further guidance on discretionary grants which we hope will be available to those businesses that are experiencing serious hardship or have had to close but do not meet the criteria of the main grant pot. All the latest information is on the website which is updated daily. You can also get regular updates by registering for our Open For Business Newsletter which will be updated every time significant new guidelines are issued. If you have any queries that are not dealt with on the website do not hesitate to email [openforbusiness@scams.gov.uk](mailto:openforbusiness@scams.gov.uk) to make contact with our specialist business support team. Any businesses who believe they are eligible can find information on how to apply, along with eligibility criteria, [via the Council's website](#).

#### **Community Grants**

South Cambs DC has made further money available to help community groups remobilise to deal with the second lockdown. These are small amounts of money in the first case but if your community has special circumstances you can apply for additional funding to help you meet your community's specific needs.

## **Government's Planning White Paper**

The consultation on the government's Planning White Paper (PWP) has now closed. The PWP is thin on detail and ignores opportunities to address the inadequacies of the National Planning Policy Framework or the very damaging consequences of new permitted development rights. Nor does it pay heed to Government putting its own planning inspectorate in order which was partly responsible for the 4.5 years it took to approve the current South Cambs local plan resulting in 2 years of no five-year housing land supply and 4000 unplanned houses built with no financial contribution to the communities in which they were sited.

The Government loves to play to its audience and its 'Build Beautiful Commission' does just that. But if a national design standard to deliver 'beauty' results in houses with no reference to local, indigenous architecture then we have countrywide 'cookie cutter' developments. Moreover, there is little mention of standards, climate change, or homes that support health and wellbeing - all the things that really matter to people.

The last 15 years has seen a 50% decline in small and medium sized builders and developers and though they often build better, build quicker and build cheaper they will need help to purchase our very expensive land. If the government is not going to give them that help councils need to have the powers and resources to do so.

Additionally, the proposal that no affordable housing will be required for developments of less than 50 units will preclude any new affordable homes in many of our villages, depriving people of the choice to live where they want to live - often close to family, support networks or jobs.

Housing Minister Mr. Pincher was quite convinced that parish councils and residents would be so delighted that they were to play a full part in local plan formation that they would not mind that this would be the point at which their voices ceased to be heard. Once 'zones' are created development could go ahead. Our view is that the parish council and resident voice adds hugely to the evidence for and against development.

This White Paper appears to be a 'developers charter', removing democracy from planning, silencing local voices, and centralising decision making.

## **Police**

### **Policing Changes**

Cambridgeshire's Chief Constable has announced changes to policing in order to assist in saving £1.7 million in 2021/22. Included in the cuts are the reduction of PCSOs from 80 to 40, but with a single role profile and improved alignment to their team and they will cover all 28 neighbourhoods in the county to deal with the issues that matter most to the local community. Also going is the community safety team resulting in the reduction of six community safety officer posts and the closure of nine enquiry offices (NOT the police stations), with the implementation of a team of police officers to provide people in each local authority area with an appointment-based service to allow members of the public to make an appointment to speak to an officer.

Chief Constable Nick Dean said: "We have had to make some incredibly difficult decisions over the past 12 months when considering how we balance the needs of the community and the policing service we provide, with being able to manage within the budget we have – we simply could not continue with the existing neighbourhood policing model with the budget constraints we currently face, and are likely to have in the coming years."

## **Volunteer Police Cadets**

The police are encouraging young people between 13 and 18 to join the Volunteer Police Cadets. The aim is to encourage the spirit of adventure and good citizenship to anyone wishing to support their community and gain an understanding of policing. It is not to recruit police officers for the future. If you are interested and can spare three or more hours per month, please contact [Cadets@cambs.pnn.police.UK](mailto:Cadets@cambs.pnn.police.UK)