

Meldreth Parish Council March 2022 –District and County Councillor Report

GCP and Melbourn Greenway

Last month we met the new officer team assigned to the Melbourn Greenway scheme. The current stage of work is focused urgently on the field path to Meldreth Station and resolving land issues there in order to allow the upgraded path to be delivered. Later in the year a detailed plan for the rest of the Melbourn Greenway will be put out for public consultation. The Greenway will be delivered in segments, not all at once; we don't know yet the sequence.

Susan attended the Greater Cambridge Partnership Assembly to comment on need for action on Greenway following a long period of quiet – and all the other speakers gave the same message. There are 12 Greenway schemes in all, so a great deal to deliver. She is also working with Highways on a couple of junction points along the A10 cycle/pedestrian path which need clearer priority access indications, following an alert on two collisions at the BP Station in Harston.

Please note how important it is to log any accident data with police – without it there is no knowledge at Highways of problem areas.

Rail Service improvements from 28 February

Please note this step change in building up rail services back to half-hourly – a gradual process.

- From 28 February-15 May, we'll see the same current hourly base timetable, but with additional scheduled morning and afternoon stops designed to accommodate Meldreth-Shepreth-Foxton-Cambridge school travel. The additional stops will consist of:
 - 08:06 (Meldreth), 08:10 (Shepreth), 08:12 (Foxton), 08:23 (Cambridge)
 - 16:06 (Meldreth) 16:10 (Shepreth), 16:12 (Foxton) 16:23 (Cambridge)
- and
- 07:57 (Cambridge), 08:06 (Foxton), 08:09 (Shepreth), 08:12 (Meldreth) – usual station calling pattern to arrive King's Cross at 09:20
 - 15:57 (Cambridge), 16:06 (Foxton), 16:09 (Shepreth), 16:12 (Meldreth) – usual station calling pattern to arrive King's Cross at 17:20

There will be no change at this time to services to London – but this should improve in May. So, continuing with the current service of two trains per hour running between Royston and London King's Cross, with one of these picking up at Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton. Note parking is free at Shepreth Station and cheap at Meldreth Station (£1.50 daily before 10AM, 50P daily after 10AM).

While the overall position is improving, some individual depots still have very significant absence levels, and there is a legacy of two years of disruption to training. We are now starting to see more people return to rail, albeit in much lower numbers than before the pandemic, particularly with many still working from home. Ridership on our line is at about 60%.

In the short term, GTR are focusing on reliability, so that passengers can be confident that trains will turn up as scheduled. Reliability has been very high since January 1st. The next timetable change will take place in mid-May. The plan then is to restore the pre-pandemic half-hourly weekday service.

Oil Club

This year's household bulk buy Oil Club rebate will be going to North Herts Citizens Advice, supporting their work for our area and in particular their weekly drop-in service at the Melbourn Hub.

Health and Social Care reforms

A reminder – a major reorganization of health and social care is happening now, with legislation in the process of passing through Parliament and lots of questions for us at ground level: what does all this mean for my community and me? There will be a requirement for the NHS and Local Authorities to collaborate on the integration of health and social care. Susan is chairing the Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Board which is where the two partners come together. In Melbourn, the Hub is breaking ground in delivering new ways of helping to deliver primary care services, which will assist the Orchard Surgery and all other GP practices in our local Primary Care network. We'll be hosting a Zoom chat on March 9th, 6-7PM – please let us know if you'd like to join us.

County Council Budget

A Local Government Association peer review team visiting Cambridgeshire last summer, consisting of senior councillors from all political parties and senior officers from several local authorities, concluded:

"The Council is entering a period where future years budget gaps and required mitigation are of a significant magnitude and urgent. A forecasted budget gap of £64m over the MTFS period requires detailed and immediate planning. There has been a reliance on one-off balances and some use of reserves across previous years to fund the budget shortfall which has resulted from a lack of financial strategic planning which is not sustainable. Although balancing the budget from the general fund balance is possible in the short-term, using reserves is seen as high-risk and should be avoided. Historic decisions not to increase council tax by the maximum possible has resulted in significant ongoing lost income. There is now a need to establish a clear Council Tax strategy for the next 4 years."

The council has now agreed its budget for 2022-23, which closes a projected £22.2 million gap using efficiencies, savings, and the government's one-year financial settlement. It also starts to address a projected gap of more than £80 million over the next five years.

Budget gaps have continued to grow. Between the December and January there was an increase of £2.5m in the costs of providing care and our own social care workforce, as a result of significant pressures (supply chain, cost of living rises) and labour shortages facing the sector.

The headline government announcement was that Cambridgeshire's core spending power would increase by 8%, but around two-thirds is due to the additional Council tax that the settlement allows us to precept, and that government assumes will be utilized.

There has been no indication of any continuation of government support for free school meals during the holidays, or for the household support fund.

The County Council share of council tax will increase by 4.99 per cent – 1.99 per cent for general services, and a 3 per cent rise for Adult Social Care. This will mean an extra charge of 90p per week for a Band A household, £1.04 per week for a Band B household, and £1.19 for a Band C household.

The increase in Band D is £1.34 per week, which will still leave the County Council's council tax share below the average for shire counties.

The increase comes at a time when many families are struggling with increases outside the council's control, such as National Insurance, energy bills, and food price rises. The council's budget therefore offers a safety net for those least able to pay.

The budget also offers support through

- The Household Support Fund – a one-off £20 payment open to all 39,000 Cambridgeshire people on universal credit, as well as extra help for specific bills or replacement of essential items such as cookers, washing machines or fridges.
- Continued funding for Free School Meals throughout the school holidays – £15 per week for each eligible child.
- A 100 per cent council tax rebate for care leavers until they reach the age of 21, and a targeted fund to support them, if they need it, until they are 25.
- A £1 million 'catch up' fund to help children catch up on activities which help them learn skills, build self-confidence and make friends.

In addition, the council's business plan pledges to deliver a 'Just Transition Fund' towards a more equal and sustainable Cambridgeshire –with scope to include flood prevention and environment and climate action as well as a variety of social enterprises, such as repair cafes and social care enterprises.

The council's business plans also includes:

- A £2.9 million countywide programme to support older people living in their own communities and homes for longer – part of a proposed investment in a new vision to create a more localized care workforce.
- Increased investment in projects which support biodiversity and access to open spaces.
- More investment to improve safety on roads, and the accessibility of footways and bridle paths.
- A continued roll out of the Real Living Wage, not just for lowest paid council staff but working with contractor and supplier organisations to make this aspiration a reality as soon as possible.

South Cambs District Council Tax

February 22 South Cambridgeshire District Council approved its budget for next year and set its Council Tax charge from April.

Continuing to have one of the lowest Council Tax charges in the country, Lib Dem councillors agreed to raise it by 10 pence a week or £5 a year for a Band D property to enable the Council to continue to transform council services and deliver £230,000 of savings every year.

Not to have raised Council Tax by even this small amount would have led to a deficit of £1.5 million over the coming five years and cuts.

The budget also supports the Council's zero carbon strategy with over £6 million to be spent on items such as a solar farm for our Waterbeach waste depot, more electric bin lorries, electric vehicle

charging points and more money for the renewables fund which we use to fund green community initiatives across the District, such as the electric bicycle scheme in Teversham.

This coming year it will cost over £80 million to run South Cambridgeshire District and Council Tax will bring in £10.7 million. Business Rates bring us £11.6 million, which is why one of the first things the new Lib Dem administration did was to set up a business development team, which has proved invaluable in distributing Covid grants to stop businesses going to the wall during the Lockdowns. But you can see how important business is to delivering council services. As to the Government we expect to get just £2million in grants from it.

As to the difference between the £80 million and the £25 million income from taxation and grants, our investments play a big part delivering over £5 million in income. Our investments include Ermine Street our wholly owned housing company providing private rented accommodation, such as houses in multiple occupation for single people, the Cambridge Ice Rink and even Cambourne Youth Centre. We are also supporting business start-ups and the development of tech industries by investing in the Cambridge Science Park which is in South Cambridgeshire and receive income from rents.

We also receive income from our fees and charges and contributions from fellow councils for the cost of running the shared planning and waste services. But unlike many other Councils we do not have income from car parks or civic amenities such as a sports centre.

As to our council housing stock, this is now growing again and with 189 new council homes having been built over the past three years it now stands at over 5,500. However, we have to fund this mainly from council rents as unlike Cambridge City we get very little money from Government for house building and cannot use Council Tax and Business Tax income. Given the hundreds on our council waiting list we must continue to build more. This means we have no choice but to increase council rents. Rents will bring in nearly £32 million in the coming year and we will be spending £17 million on new build and £7 million on refurbishing existing stock to reduce tenants' heating bills.

We appreciate that in these difficult times those on lower incomes are struggling that's why we well have more officers advising those finding themselves in financial difficult and pay Citizens Advice £85,000 a year to help our residents. Apart from Housing Benefit we also have a Local Council Tax Support Scheme and discretionary support for Council Tax. As a result of this support, last year we were the best in the country for collecting Council Tax and in the top ten for the collection of Business Rates.

We are one of a few councils in the country to have set a balanced budget for the coming financial year with a small surplus going into reserves to off-set possibly deficits in the future.

Community Chest Grants for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee

SCDC would like to support communities in marking 'The Queen's Platinum Jubilee'. For this reason, the criteria for the Community Chest Grant scheme has been flexed on a temporary and one-off basis until 12 April to allow Parish Councils and community groups to make Jubilee-related applications of up to £700. Applications will then be assessed at the Grants Advisory Committee meetings in March and April to help parishes plan.

Maybe you'd like to purchase a Commemoration bench? Or plant a tree or a rose in honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee? These are just a couple of ideas! We welcome your application, and if you

know of any community groups wishing to undertake a Jubilee-related project, we would ask you to make them aware of this fund.

Applications should be in the spirit of the rest of the Community Chest grant criteria. For further details and how to apply, please visit the Council's [Community Chest Grant page](#).

Investigation finds former deputy leader of County Council breached code conduct

An independent investigation has concluded that former Cambridgeshire County Council deputy leader Roger Hickford breached the Council's Code of Conduct in six different areas– including bullying, improper use of his position and bringing the council into disrepute.

The Council's Constitution and Ethics Committee chaired by Sebastian Kindersley heard the independent investigator present his report and agreed for the confidential paper to be placed in the public domain. Links to report and recorded meeting are here.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/news/investigation-finds-former-deputy-leader-breached-code-of-conduct>

Be Kind

This is a plug to help spread the message for the '#BeKind' campaign on behalf of all those working in public services that are struggling amidst pandemic and other pressures.