

Council Report January 2010

Have your say on improving transport in Cambridgeshire.

Three months of public consultation have been launched to help update the Local Transport Plan for Cambridgeshire. This will be the third Local Transport Plan for the county and is a blue-print, based on the priorities set by residents, on what transport schemes should come forward. Every home in the county will receive a leaflet outlining initial plans and giving each household the opportunity to give their views by returning a questionnaire. Throughout February and March exhibitions will be held in locations around the county and people will also be able to complete the questionnaire on-line via a link from the main Local Transport Plan page at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ltp

£1.5 million provides over 200 temporary jobs for long term unemployed.

237 temporary jobs for young people and the long-term unemployed will be created across Cambridgeshire thanks to £1.5 million received by organisations across the county. The new money was awarded to Cambridgeshire Together, a group of the county's most influential public and voluntary organisations, after it made a bid to the Government's Future Jobs Fund. The jobs are aimed at 18-24 years olds who have been out of work and claiming Job Seekers' Allowance for at least nine months. The long-term unemployed aged 25 and over who are claiming Job Seekers' Allowance and live in areas where the unemployment rate is 1.5 per cent higher than the national average will also benefit from the new job opportunities. Those qualifying for the scheme will need to apply through Jobcentre Plus with the first jobs available from February.

Cambridgeshire revises gritting routes in light of UK salt shortage.

The prolonged spell of winter weather, a national shortage of salt and government instructions to reduce the amount of road treatment nationally, has meant that the County Council has had to review its gritting operations. In line with neighbouring counties, Cambridgeshire is now only gritting 'A' roads and a priority network of 'B' roads as well as waterside roads such as those next to drains in the Fens. This will continue until sufficient new deliveries of rocksalt can be secured. Details of the revised network of roads which are being treated are available on the County Council's website - www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Adjustments made to make boarding the bus even easier.

Cambridgeshire is leading the way with raised bus stop platforms that give easier access to public transport for those with disabilities. The eight stops in Cambridge are part of the guided busway project which has raised platforms along the concrete track to make the system easier for wheelchair and pushchair users.

School improvement leads to number 10 invitation.

Improvements at a Cambridge primary school have led to an invitation to drinks with the Prime Minister. Colville Primary School in Cherry Hinton is one of 100 most improved schools in the country, whose headteachers who were invited to the Downing Street reception. Improvement was based on SAT results over the last three years - the percentage of pupils scoring level 4 and above in English, maths and science at the end of Key Stage 2. Colville Primary was placed joint 55th in the country for the most improved scores - the only school in Cambridgeshire to feature in the list.

Work due to start on new Caldecote Children's Centre.

Work is due to start next Easter on a new Children's Centre building for Caldecote and the surrounding villages. The new Centre will be built at Caldecote Primary School and will cater for children aged from birth to five and their families. Children's Centres are a national government initiative, which are being delivered across the country by local authorities. The Little Footsteps Children's Centre will serve Barton, Caldecote, Comberton, Coton, Grantchester, Great Eversden, Hardwick, Harlton, Haslingfield, Kingston, Little Eversden, Madingley and Toft.

New reception class finds temporary home at the Lantern.

The Lantern Primary School in Ely is to cater for more children living in the area by providing an extra Reception class for children eligible to start school in September. The County Council decision means The Lantern will have three Reception classes in September, providing for a total of 90 children aged 4 and 5. The Lantern will provide an additional Reception class in 2010 only, while the County Council continues to work with other primary schools in Ely to ensure there are sufficient primary school places available from 2011 onwards to meet predicted demand.

Birthday party as St Neots Library celebrates its quarter century.

Scores of people turned out when St Neots Library celebrated its 25th birthday with a special event for the whole community on January 9. At various stages during the day, activities included caricatures and face painting, craft activities, youngsters dressing up as their favourite book character, poster design competition, a prize draw and refreshments.

Numbers up for Library users!

Current and future Library users were encouraged to check their unique pin number which will enable them to access an expanded range of services at the new Wisbech Library which is set to open on February 1.

The pin number allows users to:

- * Borrow and return items via new self service machines
- * Access the internet at any County Council Library
- * Find, request and renew books, DVDs and CDs online either in the library or from a home computer
- * Access the 'Your Library Online' features for learning, research and study

Anyone who wants to obtain or check a pin number should go to any County Council Library, complete the online form at: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/library or call 0345 045 5225. Wisbech Library at The Crescent, has been extended and remodelled at ground and first floor level, with a new learning centre, a community meeting room equipped with ceiling mounted projector and hearing loop, and better facilities throughout including more room for children, new toilets and a lift.

Cambridgeshire Children's Trust

The Cambridgeshire Children's Trust Board, comprising elected representatives, non-executives directors or board members and trustees, met for the first time on 14 December. It agreed to endorse the principles detailed in the Children and Young People's Active Engagement Strategy and Parent and Carer Involvement Strategy. It also received a report and presentation on Child Poverty and Fuel Poverty.

Scrutiny

The Environment and Community Services Scrutiny Committee recently scrutinised the Highways Contract. This resulted in 9 recommendations to Cabinet regarding political management arrangements; tackling high costs where they exist and greater benchmarking of performance. The Cabinet welcomed the recommendations and agreed to a number of measures, such as further investigation of high cost areas and greater Cabinet member involvement in the running of the Highways Contract.

Making Cambridgeshire Count

The Cambridgeshire Public Service Board (PSB) met on 11th January to follow up recommendations and guidance made by Cabinet Members and Non-Executive Board Members regarding the projects that will now be taken forward as part of the second phase of Making Cambridgeshire Count. This will begin to see the implementation of the project ideas that were developed by partners in the latter half of 2009. Chief Officers from the PSB have been assigned as leads for the projects which cover areas such as; supporting victims of domestic abuse, tackling inequalities that exist in Cambridgeshire, making our assets count and sharing services across partners. Each Making Cambridgeshire Count project is focused on producing improvements to services at better value for money for the taxpayer. A Making Cambridgeshire Count roadshow will be visiting partner organisations over January which will help promote the core objectives of the project and share information with colleagues who might be less familiar with what has taken place so far.

Comprehensive Area Assessment

The national results for Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) were published on 9th December via the Audit Commission's new web pages OnePlace (see <http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/Pages/default.aspx> for details).

The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), highlights where things are going well and where improvements need to be made. It examines how well councils are working together with other public bodies to meet the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of six inspectorates.

The national report has rated Cambridgeshire as exceptional on driving up recycling and says the county's public bodies are working well together for our communities. It reports that overall Cambridgeshire is a county of prosperity and growth and that local services are addressing the challenges their communities and agencies say we should tackle. Cambridgeshire has been given a 'green flag' for reducing waste and driving up recycling and composting levels of household waste to over 50 per cent. Green flags are given to public bodies which are achieving exceptional outcomes or doing something innovative. This new independent assessment also recognises that public services across Cambridgeshire have identified real challenges, such as inequalities in the county's less well-off areas, and are working together to help their communities.

Background

CAA is jointly assessed by six independent inspectorates:

- Audit Commission
- Care Quality Commission
- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons
- HM Inspectorate of Probation
- Ofsted

The report looked in detail at equality and inclusion, safer and stronger communities, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and managing growth.

Equality and inclusion

In terms of equality and inclusion the overall picture of life in Cambridgeshire is positive. Many people are healthy, well educated and have good incomes but there are some big differences within the area. The report says that partners are aware of these differences and services are being put in place to help people to live healthier lives. The joint inspectors say that local politicians are committed to ensure that available money is directed to help those who need it and have moved funds from more wealthy areas to less well off places.

Economic prosperity

The report said that Cambridgeshire's economy is one of the strongest in the country and until the recession many local people benefited from a long period of growth. But people in some areas do not have the same chances as in more wealthy areas as jobs are less well paid or transport links are not as good. Many young people are well prepared to benefit from prosperity in the area. Education results are generally good and more young people are staying in education to improve their prospects. Action is being taken to improve results for children in poorer families who do less well at school and has been identified as a high priority by partners.

Safer and stronger communities

Although crime in Cambridgeshire is higher than in similar places it did reduce last year. Crimes where people have been injured have increased recently and many were a result of domestic abuse or by people with alcohol problems. The report says action is being taken collectively and praises the creation of the violent crimes task group to tackle excessive drinking in Cambridge city. It also says the Police and partners are working well to tackle domestic abuse.

Environmental sustainability

Successful partnership working means that well over half the waste collected is for recycling and the amount of waste created is also reduced. Good work is being carried out to educate people and encourage businesses to recycle more. The report praises partners for working together to keep the local environment attractive and healthy. It highlights the fact that air quality has improved by using cleaner buses and pollution has reduced because more people are using public transport.

Managing growth

The report recognised that organisations are working together well to manage the significant housing and population growth. The report concludes that funding has been secured to help ensure house building continues during the recession, but it is not growth at any cost. It says partners have learned from past experiences and are making sure new housing has the necessary facilities, such as schools, when they are needed. It recognises that congestion is a problem and will get worse and the longer term solutions rely on Government funding. But it says that partners have successfully encouraged local people and visitors to use public transport.

Member Development

A report on Member Development has been prepared, including proposals and recommendations for meeting the Charter for Elected Member Development, which Cambridgeshire County Council committed to achieving in March 2009. The report will now be considered by the Member Training Panel.

Diversity

As part of the plan to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues, a new quarterly diversity update is to be produced.

The County Council has recently been promoted in a list of the top 100 best places to work, for the third year in a row, thanks to its equality and diversity policies and employment practices. Every year Stonewall publishes its 'Workplace Equality Index' (WEI), which is the definitive national benchmark highlighting Britain's top employers for lesbian, gay and bi-sexual staff. This year the competition was tougher than ever before as Stonewall has seen a vast increase in the number of organisations wishing to take part. The WEI list shows that Cambridgeshire has once again improved on its organisational score is now ranked at 90 in the list of the top 100 employers.

Yours

John Reynolds

County Councillor: John Reynolds, 4 Hollytrees, Bar Hill, CB23 8SF.
john.reynolds@cambridgeshire.gov.uk