

THE COUNTY COUNCIL - PAST YEAR AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

With the New Year arriving this provides a perfect time to reflect on the year gone by and to preview the next twelve months. 2011 has been a very challenging but successful year for Cambridgeshire County Council. On the business front we've moved on with our plans, in a bid to meet the huge budget cuts facing all our Services. We're still not there yet, but across the Authority everyone will have somehow felt the impact of the cuts we need to make.

Despite the unprecedented level of budget savings required this year, it looks as though the Council will deliver on its overall financial goals this year, provided we all do our very best through to the end of March 2012.

We have lots to celebrate and here are just a few of the very many highlights:

*The Busway opened for business in August and has surpassed expectations with hundreds of thousands of trips every month since.

*In Adult Services we've saved £1.5 million, thanks to maintaining an even closer watch on costs; initiatives to extend preventative work and through re-ablement, meaning people will need less social care later on.

*Contrary to the national trend, the number of children in care has fallen in Cambridgeshire; this is all down to the effective work with families by social workers and other children's services employees.

*We've committed to protecting our library services and placing them at the heart of public services in the county's communities.

So - what will it be like in 2012?

The Council will be working closer together and more effectively than ever before. We will be involving the public earlier in dealing with local issues and putting them at the heart of consultation activities. Our commitment to protecting the most vulnerable young people and adults will continue to be a key priority as we focus on the people that need it most whilst keeping a firm grip on costs. To do this we are working hard to transform the way we deliver services.

We will continue to be smart, bold and innovate the way in which we provide services. For example, 2012 will be the year when we shape our new role as a Public Health organisation - we will want to use this great opportunity to ensure the whole Council is making the biggest possible contribution to improving residents' health.

Driving up educational achievement will continue to be as important as ever to us. Good schools, with high quality teaching, are critical in achieving better educational outcomes and supporting the county's long term development.

It will also be the year when we complete, or make significant progress, with a number of major infrastructure projects like Chesterton station; Ely Southern Crossing; superfast broadband and finally see plans hatched to solve the problems created by the current A14.

As resources in the Council will remain very tight for many years, we will maintain our sharp focus on making every £ work as hard as possible to deliver the best outcomes for the county's residents. To do all of this, and the very many things in our plans not listed above, 2012 will be a year when we will need to be as bold, flexible and transformative as ever. Despite all the challenges we know you will remain focused on delivering high quality services for the people of Cambridgeshire.

New Year's message from Andrew Lansley MP.

Thursday, 22 December, 2011

Despite the tough challenges this year and in prospect, I am very optimistic for our future. The country is having to make some tough sacrifices to deal with our deficit and get our economy back on track and avoid the same financial fate which has struck many of our European neighbours. Although we will need to continue to make serious savings nationally, I hope that we will see our economy begin to recover by the end of 2012.

I am tremendously proud of our armed services who served our country in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya this year, and my thoughts are with those who remain in Afghanistan.

In the coming year, it is also vital for us to secure competitiveness and growth for our region and our nation. Cambridgeshire boasts a wealth of world-class talent, enterprise and natural beauty which I will be working hard to support. The announcements regarding high-speed broadband rollout and new plans and funding to solve the problems with the A14 are excellent news for our region, and will see that we stay competitive into the future.

We are very lucky to have one of the world's great universities and so many exceptional colleges, schools and training centers in Cambridge. Many of our schools this year became academies and are ranked amongst the top in the country, with more to follow in 2012.

As Secretary of State for Health, I am personally also very proud of our truly excellent hospitals and health services, and will ensure that we continue to be leaders and innovators in delivering high standards and value-for-money in this area.

I wish each of you and your loved ones a peaceful, healthy and happy New Year.

Contact Andrew Lansley MP at his constituency office

153 St Neots Road, Hardwick, Cambridge, CB23 7QJ

T 01954 212 707

F 01954 211 625

E lansleya@parliament.uk

W [Andrew Lansley](#)

F [Facebook page](#)

POLICING YOUR LOCAL AREA – A FUNDING DILEMMA

HAVE YOUR SAY: vote online www.cambs-pa.gov.uk/hottopic.cfm or email police.authority@cambs.pnn.police.uk

- In autumn 2010 the government announced massive reductions in public spending for the four year period 2011/12 to 2014/15.
- In December 2010 the government announced how much grant it would give to the Police Authority in 2011/12 and 2012/13. Over the two years Cambridgeshire will get about £11m less than previously (5% to 6% less per annum). In the following two years (2013/14 and 2014/15) reductions will be slightly less severe.

- Cambridgeshire Constabulary has already identified £11m of the £17m currently estimated to be required over four years. The force has been undertaking a restructuring programme which has moved 'back office' police officer roles to the front line while management ranks have reduced so that local constable numbers are maintained
- The Government is encouraging all local authorities not to increase their council tax in 2012-13. A one-off additional government grant of £1.5m is being offered to the Police Authority instead of raising the policing part of council tax to fund services in 2012-13.
- The grant is for one year only, whereas a council tax rise permanently increases the funding available for future years. What this means: instead of a % salary increase, you are offered a bonus instead. A salary increase would have increased your income not just in the current year but future years too. If your mortgage/ rent and utilities bills all increase due to inflation and you've spent your bonus, how will you cover the increases next year?
- Unless this lost, ongoing funding can be recovered by a council tax increase in 2013/14 – over and above the increase required to pay our unavoidable increasing costs – then the police service in Cambridgeshire would need to find a further £1.5m per year in savings. To clarify, this is in addition to the £17m we already know we have to find. £1.5m is the equivalent of 37 police constables
- The dilemma: raise council tax from April 2012 or take the grant and leave the new Police and Crime Commissioner with the decision either to raise council tax significantly from April 2013 or accept a further £1.5m per year in cuts.
- Additional considerations: local referendums must be triggered under new laws set out in the Localism Act 2011 if an authority wishes to set the increase above the government threshold. This level has been set at 4% for 2012/13. Any increase in Cambridgeshire would be below this level, and cost the average household ten pence per week.
- We are keen to hear the public's views. You can vote in our online 'hot topic' poll (www.cambs-pa.gov.uk) or email police.authority@cambs.pnn.police.uk or write to us at: Cambridgeshire Police Authority, Police HQ, Hinchingsbrooke Park, Huntingdon, PE29 6NP

FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Authority's net spending this year (2011-12) is £130m. Of this, £47m (36 per cent) is financed by local council tax payers and the balance of £83m (64 per cent) by government grant.
- The policing element of the current Band D council tax is £169.56 per annum (£3.26 per week). Most households in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are below Band D. A 3 per cent increase in the council tax is around ten pence per week.
- The Police Authority will make the decision at its meeting on February 9, 2012

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FASTER BROADBAND ANNOUNCED FOR 11 CAMBRIDGESHIRE COMMUNITIES BY BT

Histon, Kimbolton, Woolley, Wansford, Bottisham, Crafts Hill, Sawston, Soham, Madingley, Melbourn and Somersham are among 51 East of England communities included in the latest roll-out plans for BT's next generation broadband service delivered over copper lines.

This announcement is not specifically related to superfast broadband but to the use of a faster transmission of up to 20 Mbps (megabits per second) via copper lines. However, the projected doubling of maximum broadband speeds previously available will be good news for local residents and businesses

It is in addition to the £2.5 billion BT roll-out of super-fast fibre-based broadband, which is expected to bring even faster speeds to two-thirds of UK premises by the end of 2014.

ARE YOU SET FOR THE A14 CHALLENGE ?

With the Government launching its A14 Challenge to improve a road better known for delays and congestion, County Councils along its route are encouraging residents and businesses to have their say. A number of recent announcements and funding commitments by the Department of Transport and the Chancellor show a commitment to find solutions to the problems caused by the A14 and the urgent need to address these in the short and long term.

The A14 Challenge aims to develop proposals to tackle the issues of capacity, congestion and safety as new developments along the whole of the A14 will increase the pressure on a road which already carries up to 100,000 vehicles a day. The A14 Challenge encourages all to get involved and to make their ideas known either through emailing them to A14Challenge@dft.gsi.gov.uk or logging on to: www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-20111212/ to ensure that as much local knowledge and experience is included in the process.

As well as this, local and national experts will be looking at the problem and will be considering all options to improve the A14 corridor. This will not be limited to the road itself, but include other measures to reduce overall traffic such as improvements to rail and rail freight services.

Cambridgeshire County Council Leader Nick Clarke, said: "The A14 Challenge is there for us all to put forward ideas, concepts and proposals to get the A14 moving. For too long, the road has been a byword for traffic jams, delays and frustration. I have no doubt it has held back businesses in Cambridgeshire from fulfilling their potential or worse to my mind deterred investment from coming to the East of England. Now the Government has recognised this, our efforts must focus on developing the ideas which will make a difference in the future rather than revisit old issues. We have the opportunity to create an A14 which will enhance rather than hinder our economy and I can't wait get involved."

TIME LIMIT EXTENDED FOR BIDS TO MAKE LOCAL COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS

Local people around Cambridgeshire can now bid for County Council cash for highways projects which will improve their community - and the time limit has been extended to give people more time prepare their submissions. The County Council has adopted a new approach which gives local communities a real influence over minor highway improvements - and details of how to apply for the cash are now available online. The closing date for bids has now been extended until February 1, 2012.

For many years the County Council contributed towards a jointly funded programme with district councils. Typically the authority made around £200,000 available. But the level of interest from the districts has reduced and the county council is now looking at ways to make the cash available directly to communities at a local level. Successful projects would be those which provide improvements considered to offer benefit to the local community and have the support of local people. Parish councils, community and residents groups and charities are eligible to bid.

Details of how to apply are now available at:

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transport/localism/Minor+works+funding+opportunities.htm>

Bids up to a maximum of £10,000 each are invited and there will be an expectation that the bidder will provide some level of financial contribution to the overall cost of the project - with a minimum contribution of 10% anticipated. Successful projects could include better signing and lining, speed reduction measures, dropped crossing points or a new bus shelter.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "Local people know best what is needed in their community and this is an excellent opportunity for them to put forward ideas for local priorities and improvements to the highways network which would benefit everyone in their area. This is a real opportunity for the local community to have a genuine influence over what goes on in their area and to work in partnership with the county council - localism at its best and we have extended the time limit beyond the festive season to provide more time for local organisations to prepare their bids."

Bids will be assessed by an advisory panel of County Councillors for each district area of Cambridgeshire. The panels will take into account the views of parish councils and district councillors, before making recommendations to the county council for funding.

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PLANS FOR NEW ELY CROSSING A STEP CLOSER

Plans to tackle congestion on the A142 in Ely, help regenerate the South of Ely and bring real benefits to a national railway line are now a step closer. The Council's Cabinet have received the results of a public consultation on possible options to solve the issues at the Ely railway crossing.

Of the 1,700 responses received, 81 per cent of residents supported the preferred option Route B, a new road to bypass the level crossing, compared to ten per cent who supported route D and four per cent who preferred an underpass.

The proposed link road will be just over a mile long diverting the A142 at Angel Drove to just outside Stuntney via two roundabouts, a bridge over the railway line, the River Great Ouse and its floodplains. A solution to the congestion at the Ely Railway Crossing will not only reduce congestion in the local area, minimise disruption to freight and passenger travel as well as supporting the long term economic growth of Ely.

Councillor John Reynolds said: "Thousands of cars and lorries use the A142 around Ely every day, hindered to a huge extent by how often the level crossing is closed. The benefits of finding a solution to this conflict between the road and rail traffic is obvious. For if we have an alternative to using the level crossing the railway can develop into a freight and passenger line of national significance while Ely to develop economically, free of the shackles of congestion.

"To have 81 per cent of all respondents supporting Route B is overwhelming and this was supported by many comments which asked for the new road to be built as soon as possible. The aim now is to progress the plans which will be put out for further consultation to ensure we develop a solution for Ely which will have a positive legacy for the county."

The County Council will now develop detailed plans for the preferred route, which will include environmental assessments of impact on the conservation area and cathedral setting with further consultation scheduled to take place next spring prior to the planning application being submitted in the autumn. This will then be followed by a public enquiry. Should everything go to timetable and funding be obtained, the earliest the new road could be completed by Autumn 2015.

A FORCE FOR GOOD SIGNED AND SEALED AT CHRISTMAS CONCERT

A special Covenant between Cambridgeshire's communities and the armed forces has been formally signed at a Christmas concert. In October, Cambridgeshire County Council agreed to adopt its own Armed Forces Community Covenant at a meeting of the Full Council. The Armed Forces Community Covenant aims to: encourage local communities to support the Armed Forces community in their areas

1 nurture public understanding and awareness amongst the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community.

2 recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the Armed Forces Community.

3 encourage activities which help to integrate the Armed Forces Community into local life.

4 to encourage the Armed Forces Community to help and support the wider community, whether through participation in events and joint projects, or other forms of engagement.

The covenant was signed by senior officers from all three services during a special concert by the Cambridgeshire Youth Wind Orchestra and the Minden Band of the Queen's Division at the Corn Exchange in Cambridge on Sunday 18 December.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said "The Covenant signing will be an important step in demonstrating and embedding the support of the County's residents for the armed forces. We know how important the forces are to our communities and the deep regard with which people hold the men and women serving in Army regiments, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. They have turned out in their hundreds to homecoming parades and the strength of feeling is clear.

Lt Col Seb Pollington, Commanding Officer of Cambridge university Officer Training Corps, said: "There is absolutely no doubt that the men and women of our armed services are incredibly moved by the warmth of the public shows of support they have received in Cambridgeshire and across the Country.

DON'T SHOW INTEREST IN BANK CHARGE SCAM - TRADING STANDARDS WARN

Trading Standards officers are warning Cambridgeshire people to beware of a bank charge scam which is doing the rounds in the county after people received calls claiming to be from a government department. County Council Trading Standards has received complaints from local people who have received a call claiming to be from the 'Office of Fair Trading' or 'OFT' - offering to reclaim bank charges or other financial charges, for a fee.

The caller typically says they have a cheque for several thousand pounds for the customer, and they just need to pay a fee to receive the money. The OFT - a

government department - has issued a statement to say that these calls are not in any way connected with their organisation and has warned that the scam is one of a number of similar types of calls which claim to be from them, all of which are a hoax.

A spokesman for the OFT, said: "Anyone who is concerned about the authenticity of a telephone call claiming from be from the OFT should confirm the name of the caller and offer to call them back. They should then contact the OFT on 0207 211 8000 and ask to speak to the named individual. We will then be able to confirm if the name of the caller is a genuine OFT employee."

Other similar hoax calls have been received with the caller claiming to be from a government department or from Trading Standards, offering to help similar financial recovery services in return for a fee. No government or local authority agency would ever cold call members of the public in such a way.

A list of the scams is available on the OFT website, at <http://www.of.gov.uk/business-advice/protect-your-business-from-scams/types/bogus> and also on the Action Fraud Website at <http://www.actionfraud.org.uk/>.

This latest scam follows a spate of complaints to Cambridgeshire Trading Standards about businesses charging to recover compensation for customers who were miss-sold payment protection insurance (PPI). In fact people can recover such fees themselves without incurring a charge. For advice on doing this, contact the Financial Ombudsman Service on 0800 0234567. They are an independent ombudsman for the banking and insurance industry.

If you have been affected by a scam, you can report it on the Action Fraud website or by contacting Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040. Anyone who wants help or advice on scams or any other consumer issue should contact Trading Standards advice partner, Consumer Direct, on 08454 040506.

CHANCE TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ANCIENTS

People can now follow in the footsteps of our ancestors thanks to work by Cambridgeshire County Council's Countryside Rights of Way and Access Team to improve the surface of an ancient footpath in the county. A stretch of the Icknield Way around Heydon was resurfaced to improve walking conditions and the level of the path raised to improve the surface water drainage.

The work cost around £3,500. The Icknield Way is a pre-historic set of trackways which run from the Ivanhoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Knettishall Heath, at Thetford in Norfolk. These old trade routes used to cross open heath and moorland and whilst the agricultural landscape of today is very different, it is still possible for walker to enjoy the countryside almost undisturbed by modern life.

Sarah Scott, on behalf of Heydon Parish Council, said: "The area has been transformed and we are extremely grateful for the professional and thorough work. It now means that walkers can navigate the area without risk and can enjoy the beautiful scenery."

For more information on the longer Icknield Way Trail check out the Icknield Way Association 's website at: <http://www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk/>

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WORK TO COMMENCE FINAL SECTION OF PATH

Cyclists and pedestrians travelling between Histon and Cottenham will soon find their journeys getting easier as construction starts on the final section of their foot and cycle way. Work will commence on Monday 9 January 2012 to create a much improved route with an excellent quality surface of two to three metres wide linking the two villages.

Improvement works already undertaken in Histon mean that once the scheme is complete cyclists from Cottenham will be able to enjoy a safer more pleasant commute into Cambridge. The £450,000 scheme is funded through the Housing Growth Fund administered by Cambridgeshire Horizons. Works are anticipated to last for 10 weeks with two way traffic signals in operation Monday to Friday between 9.30am to 3.30pm.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "This new improved route will provide an excellent, high quality cycle link, which will encourage more people to get pedaling. Cycling represents an affordable and enjoyable way to keep active whilst contributing to reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality in and around Cambridge."

CASH BOOST FOR WINTER WARMTH WORK IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

A bid for government cash to help keep people safe and warm in their own home this winter has won more than £200,000 to ensure vulnerable people are helped and supported. Cambridgeshire County Council pulled together the bid for funding from the DoH's £20 million 'Warm Homes, Healthy People' fund on behalf of partners in Cambridgeshire including the voluntary sector, district councils and Public Health.

Locally the £207,000 will be used to reduce death and illness caused by cold housing by augmenting local services and commissioning flexible, responsive services. These will quickly identify those at risk and in need, establish rapid referral systems and increase the range and level of practical support such as benefits advice, shopping services and emergency heating repairs for people who are vulnerable to the health effects of cold weather.

In addition, in periods of predicted severe weather this funding will allow us to work with the voluntary sector and communities to ensure that vulnerable people are contacted to check they are safe and well, and risks to their health are minimised by support from voluntary and local authority agencies. Cambridgeshire County Council is making the money available immediately and will be reimbursed when the Government funding allocation is received. The Cambridgeshire bid was made on behalf the County and District Council's and a range of statutory and voluntary agencies such as Age UK, the Care Network, the Community Foundation, CAB and Arthur Rank Hospice Charity

County Council Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Tony Orgee, said: "The funding from the Warm Homes Healthy People fund is a very welcome boost to the work which is already going on in Cambridgeshire to protect vulnerable people during the winter months. I am delighted that it can now expand the range of services and support for those most at risk in our communities by working ever more closely with our colleagues in the public, private and volunteer sector." "By working even more closely together, health, welfare and safety agencies across Cambridgeshire, can do even more than in previous years to support our communities and I am delighted that the government has recognized the good work which has already started and awarded this funding to Cambridgeshire which will enable us to further expand the services, support and advice we are able to offer to some of the most vulnerable people in our society."

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