

## Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report Annual Parish Meetings - Bar Hill Division

The last year has been extremely challenging for us all. We have experienced a way of life that none of us could have imagined beforehand. There has been so much loss for so many: income, livelihood, time with family and friends and most sad of all, the loss of lives. Throughout the year those working in key roles continued to provide essential services and support, and I know that we are all grateful to all those employed in the health and care sector, teachers and support staff, the emergency services, those working in essential retail and the manufacturing and warehouse staff and drivers who kept those and other essential outlets supplied.

Local authority staff, too played their part. The county council was the recipient of the majority of the government's support grant and was responsible for the 'shielded' cohort of residents – making initial contact with them and offering a range of support. The model of wider support and working with local volunteers that developed, varied from district to district but all were similar in that there was no conflict or vying for control. Whatever worked best was the order of the day and the county council passed on the funding accordingly. Many staff from across the county council were redeployed to undertake essential support roles, some taking on very different roles to those they normally had. Two warehouses were set up on Alconbury Weald thanks to the generosity of the developer at that site and with the Red Cross stepping in to staff them. These held emergency food supplies, household goods, emergency stocks of PPE for care homes, testing kits etc. That arrangement has just ended after 12 months.

Locally each village set up its own support network according to what best served local needs, and communities did all they could to provide practical help as well as keeping each other's spirits up. When unexpected challenges presented themselves, the local community responded. Well done to every one of you who helped in that effort.

Now with the amazing success of the vaccination programme, restrictions on our way of life are beginning to be eased. The gradual relaxation of the lockdown rules is such welcome news and reflects the hard work that the vast majority of people put in during lockdown to allow us to reach this point. To ensure that we don't squander all that effort, everyone is being urged to continue to stick to the rules that are in place and to follow the 'hands, face, space and fresh air' guidance.

We know that having to focus so much effort on caring for Covid-19 patients meant less resource being available for other NHS services. Efforts are now being made to address the backlogs that have been caused as a result. Transformation of the way that the NHS works is taking place even as it recovers from the pandemic, in an effort to capture some of the improved ways of working that have resulted from its experience of working under such sustained pressure.

Whilst changes may be coming to the way Public Health is managed, at the moment the county council still has that responsibility. Efficiencies have been delivered and good practice shared through the creation of a joint public health directorate across both Cambridgeshire County and Peterborough City councils. Joint commissioning of public health programmes, and partnership working across both authorities and with local NHS commissioners are footsteps on the path to the government's Integrated Care System strategy. In its public health role the county council continues to play an integral part in the management of Covid-19 outbreaks and infection control.

Similar to the NHS, some county council services have been affected by the pandemic.

**Registration Service** [Births, deaths and marriages] has experienced a difficult twelve months. When civil wedding ceremonies had to be postponed, the council refunded fees, despite having incurred costs itself. Pre-pandemic, work was underway for this service to become much more customer-focused and that will continue.

**Coroners' Service** has seen a significant increase in resources to ensure the quickest possible recovery.

Changes to the **Library Service** have continued in the last year and it is now positioned at the heart of the council's community service delivery model. Two mobile vans have just been replaced by new vehicles to allow the service to become more holistic - particularly with social mobility in mind. Whilst this work has inevitably been delayed by the pandemic, it will progress at pace following the reopening of libraries. A new central warehouse/operating hub has recently been purchased near St Ives and will open shortly. During the pandemic, the on-line and 'select and collect' services were greatly appreciated by many.

### **Adult Social Care**

Looking to the future and trying to anticipate what the world may look like post pandemic, one thing seems clear. There will be rising demand on adults' services with an increasing complexity in needs. The decades old unresolved national issue of how to fund social care doesn't appear to be anywhere nearer to being resolved and firm proposals from the government are still awaited.

In recent years Cambridgeshire has been particularly successful at investing in prevention but it remains to be seen if there will be the same level of opportunities in the future, to continue this very worthwhile work. It is surely to the benefit of all of us as we age, to be able to maintain a good quality of life, and to continue to be able to live independently. Personal investment in our own health is crucial to that. As a member of Health committee, I have supported the investment made from the public health budget to support work on preventing falls [a major cause of health deterioration in the older age group] and health checks for the over forties.

More recently I have been a member of a working group of councillors monitoring the council's progress on a strategy to invest in Care Suites. This concept provides independent living and the opportunity to access care at the appropriate level for each individual according to the progress of their needs.

### **Education**

Teachers and school support staff worked throughout the pandemic as schools remained open for the children of key workers and those considered vulnerable. At the same time teachers were also managing remote lessons to support home learning during lockdown.

Despite central government investment which provided around 4,500 laptops to children in need, research showed that around 8,000 children and young people across Cambridgeshire & Peterborough were being severely disadvantaged because they did not have access to the IT equipment or broadband they needed. The education service set itself a target to address this, both through working in partnership to refurbish donated devices and by raising funds to buy additional equipment.

The council used the initial £2.1m it received from the government as Winter Support grant to provide £15 of food vouchers to every eligible child both over the Christmas holidays and the February half term. Cambridgeshire subsequently received a further £507k which was used to extend the offer to the Easter holidays. A further announcement sees the grant renamed as Covid Local Support grant but looks to provide further funding which the council will augment to ensure that vouchers can be offered for the summer half term.

The return to school brought new challenges with schools now managing testing regimes in order to continue to contain the spread of Covid-19. Teachers also now face the challenge of helping children get back to a uniform level of learning. The DfE has recently published guidance for secondary schools on plans for summer schools. Secondary schools are being asked to sign up to run summer schools. The government continues to encourage schools to consider summer school provision, primarily for pupils making the transition into Year 7. Schools will though have the flexibility to target the funding to whoever they think could benefit most.

## **Highways & Transport**

Having seen the opening of the upgraded A14 the previous year, this last year has seen a torturous negotiating process between Highways England [HE] and the county council as the former seeks to hand over to the latter sections of old, de-trunked road and various items of new infrastructure. Having refused responsibility for restoration of the local roads that suffered through diversions and increased traffic volumes during the project, HE has supported a bid to government for additional funds to enable the council to do the work. The Bar Hill roundabout and the road through Dry Drayton were both included in the original list for restoration work and remain priorities for allocation of any funding that is secured for this purpose.

The development consent order for improvement works to the A428 was very recently submitted and accepted for examination by the planning inspectorate. County council officers are preparing to review the documents and an intensive period of work pre-examination, will include carefully scrutinising that the project plan causes no adverse impacts on any other part of the network. Meanwhile, strenuous local efforts to get the upgrade to the Girton Interchange back on the agenda have met with some success with HE adding it to the list for consideration in its next round of projects.

The council's budget meeting brought confirmation of the additional funding allocation that I have lobbied for over the recent past. An additional £20m over the next 5 years is a substantial increase in the current year allocation for footpath maintenance [£1.3m]. 50% of this will be spent on surface treatments with the other 50% being allocated for more radical work such as resurfacing and reconstruction. £2.73m additional funding was also approved for measures to prevent flooding and improve local biodiversity. This will include rapid gully clearing at all known risk sites and better verge maintenance on rural roads.

## **Re-location to New Shire Hall**

Development of New Shire Hall at Alconbury Weald has progressed during the year. Planning permission is to be sought for solar canopies to be installed in the car park. These will provide energy both for charging electric vehicles and for the building itself. The design of the building already includes solar panels on the roof to reduce energy usage from the grid, and adding these solar canopies will boost the volume of electricity generated to meet approximately 40 percent of the on-site electricity demand and support clean energy for the electric vehicle chargers. Air source heat pumps will also replace the need for fossil fuel heating on site.

The end of this year also sees the end of the council's current 4 year term. It has been a year of challenges, regrettable delays in progressing some plans, and, above all, very sad losses. It has also been a time that we can reflect on with some pride. It has seen collaborative working between organisations at all levels and has expedited new ways of working. In closing I thank all the parish councils in the division with whom I have very much enjoyed working, the community volunteers who stepped forward so quickly to do very valuable work, and to my hard working district council colleagues. My very best wishes for the future to all of you and to all the residents in the four villages that make up Bar Hill Division.

Take care. Stay safe.

*Lynda Harford*

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**STAY SAFE THIS**  
**SPRING**

Continue to follow the Covid-19 guidance  
this spring so the roadmap can continue.

*This depends on us.*

Stay local · Keep social distancing · Stick to the rule of 6

**#ThisDependsOnUs**