

Cllr Thomas Bygott

2020-21 Annual Report to Girton Parish

27th April 2021

Introduction

Thanks to everyone in the village for your support during the year. It is an honour to be your representative and, as always, I am happy to assist if you have an issue with the District Council or need some advice.

South Cambridgeshire District Council is one of several layers of local government and sits between the Parish and County levels. It covers 105 villages and the two towns of Cambourne and Northstowe. Although SCDC collects Council Tax on behalf of other local authorities, only a portion of this is collected for the District. The breakdown for the average (band D) property in Girton, following the budget meeting in February, is:

Authority	2020-21 band D	2021-22 band D	Change
Cambridgeshire County Council	£1,359.18	£1,399.77	+2.99%
South Cambs District Council	£150.31	£155.31	+3.33%
Cambridgeshire Police Commissioner	£232.65	£247.59	+6.42%
Cambridgeshire Fire Authority	£72.09	£73.53	+1.99%
Cambridgeshire And Peterborough Combined Authority	£0	£0	0%
Girton Parish Council	£68.82	£69.39	+0.83%
TOTAL	£1,883.05	£1,945.59	+3.32%

The coronavirus pandemic has made this a very unusual and difficult year, but the local community has risen to the challenge. A network of volunteers in the village has helped wherever needed, with more volunteers coming forward than needed to respond to requests for help. Throughout the pandemic to date, 5,804 people in the District (3.6%) have tested positive for the disease, ranking it 29th lowest in England.

We can now see light at the end of the tunnel in the form of vaccinations: as of 24th April, 33.5M people in the UK, just over half the population, had had their first dose and over 12M their second.

Local government has played a key role in administering many business support schemes to protect areas of the economy that were hard hit by the various lockdown restrictions. Since the start of the pandemic the District council has allocated £34M of grants, provided by the national UK Government, to 4,638 local businesses.

Last April there was a Small Business Grant Fund of £10K and a Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund of up to £25K, depending on the business' rateable value. In June there was a discretionary grants scheme for businesses that had not been eligible for the earlier round. In November, there were Local Restrictions Support Grants (LRSNG) and Additional Restrictions Support Grants (ARSG) for businesses that were forced to close their doors during last November's lockdown. In December there were Christmas Support Payments for pubs deriving less than half their income from food. Restart Grants are currently available, for which applications close on 30 June 2021: www.scams.gov.uk/business/coronavirus-information-for-businesses/financial-support-for-business/restart-grants.

There is also a £30,000 Covid recovery grant fund to help local community groups and parish councils resume activities, for which applications close on 10th May.

There have been a few problems with businesses falling through the cracks because of distribution criteria. For example, SCDC decided that taxi drivers were only eligible for grants if they both lived and had a licence in South Cambs. Some drivers found that because they live and work in different districts, they weren't entitled to a grant anywhere. SCDC also did not offer a discount on vehicle or driver licensing fees, which can be quite substantial, regardless of whether a taxi driver had been working or not.

Environment

This is one area where my group has been working co-operatively with the current administration. I don't believe that because we're in opposition we should automatically do the opposite of what the administration does. In recent times we have supported council motions for the District to become zero carbon by 2050, to declare a Climate Emergency and to request that the pension fund divest from investment in fossil fuels. The Council has policies of being 'Green to the Core' and 'Doubling Nature' that I am also very happy to support.

Far from coming at an economic cost, I believe that zero carbon initiatives will encourage new technologies, boosting efficiency, innovation and entrepreneurship. It will also make us healthier, as diesel fumes are a major cause of cancer, heart disease and dementia. In the case of investing in oil companies it is also because of the financial risks that these investments pose for the council's staff and retirees.

The blue bin system that I helped to introduce in 2007 is also going strong and has been extended into Cambridge City. The Shared Waste Service took delivery of its first all-electric bin lorry at the start of November. The new vehicle has five battery packs storing 300kWh of energy, supplying 200kW of power to its electric motors. It is substantially quieter than existing bin collection vehicles. Fully loaded it weighs around 26 tonnes and will typically take around seven to eight hours to recharge, easily completing a full day of collection rounds and returning to the depot with charge remaining in the battery.

The Shared Waste Service has around 55 diesel collection vehicles, using around 50,000 litres of diesel a month at a cost of approximately £55,000. Electric vehicles are not only more environmentally friendly but are easier to maintain as they have fewer moving parts. Battery technology has advanced to the point where, despite the distances between our villages, electric vehicles are now suitable for this role. I hope that this is the first step towards replacing all of the Council's diesel-powered vehicles.

I am also calling for East West Rail (see below) to be fully electrified during construction.

Transport

2020 was a major milestone in the completion of the A14 project. Scheduled for completion in December, it opened to traffic on Tuesday 5 May 2020 with various other works carrying on afterwards. We also have a new A1307 local road. I have been working with our MP, Anthony Browne, on bringing forward a project to add additional slip roads at the Girton Interchange in order to reduce traffic through the village.

One slip road turns left from the northbound M11 onto the westbound A428. Another turns left from the eastbound A428 to the new roundabout on the A1307 local road, connecting to Madingley, Dry Drayton and the northbound A14. The third starts at another roundabout on the A1307 providing an on-ramp to the southbound M11. I am pleased to say that Girton Parish Council has given its support to the project, as have the other parish councils in the ward.

There are several other major transport projects currently being designed. Firstly, East West Rail (EWR): a new railway line connecting Oxford and Cambridge. This is currently out to consultation until 9th June at <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation>. The official routes being consulted on pass by Cambourne, with a station either north or south of that town, before heading south to join with the existing line from Royston near Harston.

Two pressure groups - the Cam Bed Rail Road (CBRR) and Cambridge Approaches (CA) - have been campaigning for a "northern route" that would pass between Dry Drayton and Madingley and then between Girton and Oakington with a station called Northstowe on the outskirts of Oakington (but far from the town of Northstowe) before entering Cambridge from the north. It is important for Girton residents to take part in the consultation, supporting one of the southern routes, lest these nimby pressure groups succeed in moving the route away from their own villages towards ours. There are important technical reasons why a northern route is unsuitable. I will continue to talk to East West Rail and the other relevant transport authorities to protect the beautiful countryside surrounding Girton, Dry Drayton and Madingley.

Secondly, the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro (CAM), which will be delivered by One CAM Ltd under the guidance of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Mayor's office. Three consortia bidding to supply the system presented conceptual designs in March. CAM is expected to provide up to 90 miles of high quality, regionwide public transport, at a potential cost of about £2 billion, according to some of these designs. Destinations include St Neots, Mildenhall, Haverhill, Alconbury, Hauxton, Waterbeach and potentially Peterborough, Chatteris and Ramsey.

Lastly, the Cambourne to Cambridge Guided Busway (C2C) has been an ongoing source of argument for some time. I have made a submission and presented evidence to an external independent audit into the planning of the project and the design of its route. The deadline for submissions was 26th April and the report is expected to be published in the not too distant future. C2C is supposed to become part of the CAM, but its route has been chosen before the CAM specification has been published or the location of the EWR station at Cambourne decided.

The current C2C route would be very environmentally destructive, requiring 3,000 trees to be cut down along a strip of land nearly 3km long past Hardwick, and concreting over a significant stretch of countryside for a Park and Ride at Scotland Farm. I would like to see several smaller car parks distributed along the route instead, and want to protect the countryside surrounding the Cambridge American Cemetery from being damaged.

Planning

Following the adoption of the Local Plan in 2018, South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City have embarked upon the creation of the next Local Plan, combining both authorities that are now covered by the Greater Cambridge Planning Service. The first step of this process was carrying out a Call for Sites, which is a way for landowners, developers, individuals and other interested parties to suggest sites for development.

The two councils received 658 site submissions covering over 16,000 hectares of land and estimate that the sites could hold 170,000 to 200,000 houses, and around 5.8 square km of employment and other floorspace. The Call for Green Sites yielded an even larger area, nearly 29,000 hectares, including the entire Cambridge Green Belt.

Sites proposed in Girton include ten sites totalling 33 hectares, for between 135 and 445 houses and 40,000 sq m of other floor space. It is important to note that many more sites have come forward than necessary, so only a small proportion are likely to proceed; they comprise one sixth of the area of the district and three times the number of houses already built.

However, the next public consultation won't occur until Autumn 2021. It is extremely irresponsible for the councils to publish a full list of sites a year before the time when local residents can have their say. The contents of this list will have created a great deal of anxiety and distress in our villages before action can be taken to reject the most egregious sites.

Between August and October last year, the Government ran a consultation called Planning for the Future for major changes to the planning system. They are now analysing the feedback and plan to report later this year. Their ambition is to make a system that doesn't require every application to be assessed using its own unique situation, but to create form-based rules to streamline decision making. However, I believe that we need rules to prevent houses from being replaced by flats and greater protection for heritage properties before this can be done.

Readers of the Girton Parish News will have seen my stories about the proposed demolition of the Hotel Felix (www.hotelfelix.co.uk), a fine Victorian villa on Huntingdon Road dating from 1852. The application is now available for residents to make an objection on the SCDC website at www.scambs.gov.uk/planning/view-or-comment-on-a-planning-application. The reference number is 21/00953/FUL and the consultation deadline has been set to Tuesday 4th May.

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