

Melbourn Parish Council Feb 2022 – District and County Councillor Report

Oil Club

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

GCP and Melbourn Greenway

We met the new officer assigned to the Melbourn Greenway scheme earlier this month. The current stage of work is focused urgently on the path to Meldreth Station and resolving land issues there in order to allow the upgraded path to be delivered. This will include an element of lighting. 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 then spoke at 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.)

Local Highways Initiative bid

Sally Ann and Susan presented the Melbourn bid to the LHI panel earlier this month. We did our best and answered questions and have our fingers crossed for results next month. It was good to be able to refer to the work of Melbourn Futures – thanks to Graham for keeping things in gear.

20mph speed limits

New tools in the Highways community kit box are making an appearance:

Progress on introducing new 20mph speed limits to improve transport and travel safety is underway, with the County Council Highways and Transport Committee looking to establish a new process for the implementation of 20mph schemes. This would allow third parties – such as parish councils - to make an application for a 20mph limit in their chosen area, with a number of schemes then progressing following a period of assessment and prioritisation.

There are two types of 20mph schemes which can be introduced by the council – 20mph limits and 20mph zones. A 20mph limit typically covers individual or small numbers of streets and requires signs only, while 20mph zones typically cover larger areas and require both signs and markings.

The former are more cost effective, but the latter have been found to have a greater impact in reducing speed limits, especially when accompanied by traffic calming measures. It is anticipated that details outlining how applications for 20mph schemes will be prioritised, once submitted, will be brought to a committee meeting later this year.

Civil Parking Enforcement

South Cambs DC has now written to the County Council to ask them to submit an application to the Department of Transport asking them to approve Civil Parking Enforcement for all of South Cambs. The police will no longer be responsible for enforcing illegal parking but instead Enforcement Officers employed by the County Council will be. The plan is to have two officers active full time moving between the villages and issuing parking fines to people who park where they should not. The agreement of the Greater Cambridge Partnership to underwrite the first five years costs has made it possible which is extremely good news. The less good news is that the wheels of government move slowly so we don't expect it to be implemented until 2023.

Thakeham

We've attached an update that was circulate to parish council representatives to the South West Cambridge Action Group.

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 MTF5 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](#).

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? Susan chairs the Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Board which has a role to play alongside the NHS. What matters in the end is the experience of local residents in accessing health and care. If you'd like to know a little bit more, or if you can teach us a thing or two through your own experience and expertise, please join us for a Zoom coffee and chat on March 9th, 6-7PM – just let us know your contact details and we'll send you the link.

A10 Corridor Cycling Campaign – next meeting March 21st

A broad update on the Melbourn Greenway – improving cycle, walking and scooter links between Cambridge and Royston - will be provided at the next meeting of the A10 Corridor Cycling Campaign on March 21, 7:30-8:30PM, via Zoom. The link is available from the campaign – contacta10cycle@gmail.com

Station garden tidy up

A gardening day led by the Meldreth Veg Club and other volunteers has been organised for Meldreth Station on March 12, with a skip provided free of charge by Amey, the County's contractor – many thanks to all. This will also include this year's Duke of Edinburgh volunteers. As always, please contact the Community Rail Partnership if you'd like to get involved in station gardening, or if you know of a DoE volunteer who might be looking for a sponsor.

Rail Service improvements from 28 February

Upcoming changes:

- 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.

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.