

Melbourn Parish Council March 2022 – County Councillor report

Practical Solutions Group

The PSG met earlier this month, focusing on taking forward a plan for improving the A10 underpass environment. Our Community Rail Partnership officer and County Council Youth Services officers are meeting with Melbourn Village College students to come up with new artwork ideas.

A10 Underpass vegetation clear-up

Thanks to SDC contractors for offering to do this work without charge, for community benefit, the week commencing April 5th.

Rail User Group AGM April 20th

This meeting continues to be convened on line, as it's the best way of getting input from rail industry representatives. The focus now is on watching passenger numbers, in anticipation of the May timetable change which we hope will see an all-day half-hourly service return.

Household heating: Oil Club rebate to Citizens Advice

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

The Melbourn and Bassingbourn Oil Club is open to all residents in our area; there is no joining fee and no obligation to make repeat orders. The idea is simply to get the cheapest available local price on the day. If you'd like more information, please contact our local bulk-buyer Jeremy Cole of Agricole, at 01954 719 452 / 07860 904 045 or jeremy@agricole.co.uk.

Health and Social Care reforms

Thanks very much to those who joined us for an on-line evening chat about the national health and care reforms and what they might mean for us locally, and what people are most concerned about for their future. We had the input of people's direct experience, and this is what made the conversation so compelling.

We discussed the imminent National Insurance rise, the common sense support that local groups like Royston and District Community Transport and Melbourn Mobile Warden Schemes can offer (and the potential for more); the profound isolation that many people have experienced during Covid, often compounded for single parent families and people already coping with poor health; the immense value of community activities and groups that provide social life and connections with others; and the ability of places like the Melbourn Hub and community centres to provide things like dementia support, flu vaccines and parent-and-baby groups, that in turn help alleviate pressures on GP surgeries. It was agreed that we would do this again in a few months' time.

COVID-19

Routine testing for pupils and staff in schools has ended, with the exception of special schools, so the weekly report provided by the County Education team has come to an end. Free lateral flow and PCR tests will end from 1 April, with very few exceptions.

The roll out of vaccinations for 5 to 11 year-olds will begin from 31 March. Advice at this point is that children will be vaccinated in pharmacies and mass vaccination centres rather than in primary schools. Mobile vaccination centres are still in operation—see the schedule at <https://www.thevaccinators.co.uk/>

Holiday vouchers and household support for eligible families

The County Council's Children & Young People Committee has approved the continuation of the supermarket voucher scheme for 2022/23 for eligible families, on the same basis as in the current financial year. This will cost around £3.6M and will operate alongside the Holiday Activity and Food Scheme which will also continue to run in the coming year.

Special needs provision

During Covid-19 Cambridgeshire has seen an unprecedented increase in the numbers of children with special educational needs and disabilities who require a specialist placement. As of 8 February, 211 children in Cambridgeshire had an Education Health and Care Plan requiring placement in a special school or specialist provision attached to a mainstream school in the near future. This includes pupils who have moved into Cambridgeshire. These pupils are either currently on roll in a mainstream school or receiving tuition packages of alternative provision.

The council is proposing to commission new and additional places to meet this need through appropriate specialist educational provision across Cambridgeshire. On a wider, strategic scale, officers are also mapping future demand, in order to develop sustainable specialist provision for the future.

Proposals include expansion of existing Area Special schools, creation of dedicated provision attached to mainstream schools, and more efficient use of independent providers through negotiation of block contracts.

Investigation finds former deputy leader of County Council breached code conduct

You may be aware of 'Farmgate' whereby an independent investigation concluded that the former Cambridgeshire County Council deputy leader breached the Council's Code of Conduct in six different areas. Ex-Councillor Hickford failed to treat Officers and others acting on behalf of the Council with respect; used a bullying manner in order for the Council to pay for works that would otherwise be the responsibility of the tenant. He also used a bullying manner in order to set the terms of the lease for Manor Farm. He compromised Officers and others' impartiality in his dealings with regard to Manor Farm and his conduct towards Officers and others and his conflict of interest would have reduced the public's confidence in him being able to fulfil his role or the Council being able to discharge its functions.

He also used his position as Deputy Leader to receive concessions that the Council would not otherwise have agreed to and failed to register a disclosable pecuniary interest (the tenancy of Manor Farm) within 28 days and he failed to declare a non-statutory disclosable interest in meetings with regard to County Farms matters.

The Council is taking a wide range of steps to ensure that appalling behaviour such as this will never be tolerated again by officers or Councillors.