

County Councillor's Report for Parishes, July-August 2021 – Cllr Anna Bradnam

Traveller unauthorised encampments

Groups of Travellers have encamped in a number of locations in the last few weeks, locally Waterbeach and Milton. The arrival of groups within our communities causes immediate concern and upset and can take time to resolve. Parish councils engage with Bailiffs and the Police and much work is done in the background before groups can safely be moved on. I am supporting the parishes and residents as the parish councils work through these processes. The aim is to achieve resolution safely and without confrontation - and that can take time. Whilst it may appear that 'nothing is being done' that is far from true. The Parish Council is in constant contact with Bailiff and Police. The District Council provides bags and collect domestic waste and kindly support us with the subsequent clean up. The County Council provides advice and liaison and supports the parish council. Likewise local residents at Waterbeach were out litter picking the afternoon that Travellers left. I'm sure residents will help in Milton in due course. Many thanks to everyone for their patience while the encampments have been in place and for helping with the clean up afterwards.

Highways

The gas main installation through Milton, Waterbeach and along stretches of the A10 is progressing reasonably smoothly, partly because the Streetworks Inspector is being very vigilant. There have been some hiccups along the way, but the contractor is trying to get the work down as swiftly as possible.

I believe the Cambridge Water main installation still has a closure on Waterbeach Road.

Here is a selection of news from the Council:

Bringing more colour to our roadside

I have received a lot of complaints about the growth on verges; Hemlock, Giant Hogweed and Ragwort. In March 2021 the County Council acted on the advice of the Wildlife Trust and Natural England and resolved to reduce verge cutting frequency to twice a year. This being to extend flowering, to help our insect populations and biodiversity.

By changing our policy we are protecting wildflowers and improving wildlife corridors, which are areas of land that connect species with habitats that would otherwise be separated by human activities. These corridors will provide habitats for many species, with a particular focus on pollinators such as bees.

A 'cut and collect' approach is also being trialled in some villages across the county. Grass cuttings will be removed, which will affect the fertility of soil and help wildflowers to grow and thrive. This will provide habitats for different species as well as an improved environment for people using the roads.

Maintaining safety of road users remains a top priority and more cuts are being carried out at areas which have bends in the road or where visibility is a problem. Verges will be cut immediately if there is a report of visibility being obscured.

Conflict of interest guidance for members is to be strengthened

Constitution and Ethics Committee on 27 July agreed changes to conflicts of interest guidance for Members, on 27th, aim to improve transparency, build public confidence and ensure confidentiality where it's appropriate.

As part of the Council's responses to recommendations arising from the Manor Farm Audit, the Committee heard that training had taken place for all Members on the Members Code of Conduct, and approved the new guidance.

This guidance will now be recommended to Full Council as an appendix to the Members' Code of Conduct in the Council's Constitution to ensure the necessary level of visibility.

Whistleblowing

A revised and strengthened whistleblowing policy aiming to embed confidence that concerns are taken seriously by the County Council was approved by Cambridgeshire's Audit and Accounts Committee on 22 July.

The policy has recently been reviewed and amended in consultation with the council's senior officers and recognised Trade Unions.

The new policy is now more concise, clearer and signposts where concerns that don't fit under the whistleblower policy can be addressed.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) protects employees who make a whistleblowing disclosure from harassment or victimisation.

Members Allowances

Cambridgeshire County Council has agreed proposals put forward by an independent panel for changes to its scheme of Members allowances – at Full Council meeting (July 20th), leading to a saving of more than £60k per annum.

The panel, made up of local residents, business people and members of the judiciary, considered the amount of basic allowance paid to every councillor and the amount paid in addition for any 'special responsibilities'. This was last reviewed in 2017.

Any future increases will be linked to the % annual increase agreed for staff and Council also agreed to promote a policy for parental leave for councillors, which will now be prepared by Constitution and Ethics Committee for Full Council's agreement.

This represents a small increase from the basic allowance agreed in 2017 of £10,315 per annum, because since then no indexation has been applied, but it remains lower than the national average basic allowance paid to Members across the UK of £12,671 per annum.

Solar energy generation at St Ives Park and Ride site

Cambridgeshire County Council's innovative smart energy micro-grid project to generate power by installing solar panels at St Ives Park and Ride site has moved closer to fruition. The project has been offered a £2million grant towards its construction from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

The smart energy micro-grid will house approximately 1,800 solar panels and take around a year to complete. The park and ride will remain open while work takes place. The panels will generate 28Gwh of electricity over the 30-year life of the project, which will not only provide power for the site but also for businesses close by. The project will also result in a reduction of 7,691 tonnes of carbon emissions over its lifetime. The project also includes battery storage, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and private wires to send power to the businesses which will be using the green energy generated by the site. In addition, the learning and development of the project will be shared with local businesses as part of a business support programme, to help build knowledge, skills and capacity in the low carbon sector.

Council supports late applications to the EU Settlement Scheme

Cambridgeshire County Council unanimously backed a motion to promote and support late applications to the EU Settlement Scheme at yesterday's Full Council meeting (Tuesday, 20 July).

The motion, which was put forward by Councillor Lorna Dupre, was seconded by Councillor Alex Bulat, who is the first Romanian-born county councillor in the UK. It recognises the council's responsibility to those who need its help to complete applications to the scheme, particularly those citizens who the council is responsible for, for example children and adults in council care.

As part of this work, training will be given to staff to support citizens with their applications, and the council will use its networks and partners to develop and implement a proactive public information campaign.

Although the original application deadline to apply for settled status passed on 30 June, the Government is permitting late applications that meet certain criteria. These include late applications from people that can show 'reasonable grounds' for why an application wasn't made by the deadline. These include:

- The applicant being a child, or applying for a child, and they didn't know they needed to apply
- A parent, guardian or local authority not applying for the applicant when they were a child
- Having a medical condition that prevented someone from applying
- Having care or support needs
- Being the victim of modern slavery
- Being in an abusive or controlling relationship
- Not having access to the internet or not having access to the correct documentation
- Another compelling practical or compassionate reason which prevented someone from applying.

A call for caution over Covid (21/07/2021)

A collective plea for people to show caution has come from the leaders of public sector organisations across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with Covid-19 rates rising sharply and concerns that this will affect vulnerable people and overwhelm public services.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's Director of Public Health, Jyoti Atri, has been joined by Chief Constable Nick Dean, Chief Fire Officer Chris Strickland, Chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group and local GP Gary Howsam and Chief Operating Officer of the East of England Ambulance Service, Marcus Bailey, to urge residents to do the right thing and keep following the measures that can reduce transmission of the virus.

Hospitals in the area are under immense pressure, with increasing demands for urgent care. Increases in Covid cases requiring hospital care will add further stress to system. In addition, all of our public services have been further impacted by having high numbers of staff self-isolating, either because they have tested positive, or they have been a close contact of someone who has. There is concern that if rates continue to rise further, it could impact the delivery of key services.

As a result, the leaders of public sector organisations have come together to make a collective plea for people to do whatever they can to reduce transmission of Covid-19. This includes:

- Saying yes to both doses of the vaccine - with all adults now eligible and people able to have their second dose eight week after the first.
- Taking a rapid test twice a week to identify the one in three people with Covid without symptoms.
- Taking a test and self-isolating if you have symptoms of Covid-19.
- Reducing unnecessary contact with others indoors.
- Meeting people outdoors or in well-ventilated places if possible.
- Wearing a mask in crowded places – or where you can't keep a distance.
- Washing your hands thoroughly and regularly

Jyoti Atri, Director of Public Health for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, said: "We are at such a critical point in the pandemic, with the number of infections rising every day and people now able to make their own decisions on what they do to keep themselves and others safe.

"I can understand why people are keen to resume their normal activities, but there are steps we can take to protect ourselves and others, whilst going back to doing the things that we enjoy. For example, we can choose to meet people outdoors, especially whilst the weather is so good and wear masks in indoor spaces. This is important even if you have had both doses of the vaccine as there is still a chance you can carry and pass on the virus.

Chief Fire Officer for Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, Chris Strickland, said: "At Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, what is most important to us is being able to take your 999 calls and then sending the right resources out to help you, whether that's a fire engine or one of our specialist rescue teams or vehicles.

"Although the majority of restrictions have lifted this week, we would still urge people to exercise caution and think of others. At the moment the close contact isolation rule is still in place, so this poses a real risk to our ability to have enough firefighters and control room staff to maintain our normal level of service – one positive Covid result can mean a number of staff have to isolate for 10 days. This could mean a fire engine not having a crew.

Nick Dean, Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire Constabulary, said: "While legislation has changed, removing the vast majority of legal requirements, we know the biggest threat to all of our health is the spread of Covid 19 through close contact and failing to adhere to basic hygiene guidance such as wearing face coverings in crowded places.

"We want to make sure we are keeping ourselves safe as well as reducing the risk to others; the only way to do this is by all of us playing our part and stepping up our personal responsibility at this critical time.

Dr Gary Howsam, Chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group and local GP, said: "Covid-19 has not gone away. Whilst the vaccination programme is helping the country to get back to normal, it is critically important that people come back for their second dose. The second dose of vaccine gives you the best possible protection against Covid-19, and you can have it any time from eight weeks after your first dose. I would strongly urge anyone who hasn't yet had their second vaccination, or indeed their first, to get the jab as soon as they can as we see case numbers continue to rise again locally.

"We are also asking people to continue to wear masks, wash their hands and socially distance when visiting local NHS facilities. This is a critical line of defence against the spread of Covid and helps us to protect those who are most vulnerable from the disease.

Marcus Bailey, Chief Operating Officer at East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST), said: "We would like to remind everyone that they can keep themselves safe and support the NHS by getting both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, following strict hand hygiene, continuing to socially distance and wearing masks where appropriate.

"We encourage people to use 999 wisely and choose the NHS service best suited for their needs.

"Please remember, urgent advice and help can be sought through www.111.nhs.uk or calling 111, or in a life-threatening emergency, people should call 999."