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# County Councillor Report

## Cllr Michael Atkins, Hardwick Division

### January 2022

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#### Summary

- Covid-19: Plan A restrictions; case rates very high, particularly in children
- County Council Budget: increase in council tax, household support fund, just transition fund
- Active travel proposals: modified after resident feedback
- Traffic order: proposed change in speed limit on St Neots Rd
- 400 homes to benefit from improved energy efficiency
- Additional needs employment event
- Farm tenancies available
- Contact details

#### Covid-19

As you will be aware, we have now left 'Plan B' restrictions and returned to 'Plan A'. Residents are encouraged to: get vaccinated, including a booster; wear face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces; let fresh air in if meeting indoors; and continue testing and self-isolating if required.

Data suggests that there are over 300 cases per day in South Cambridgeshire, with particularly high rates for 5-14 year olds (about 1 in 25 have covid). These figures are likely to be underestimates given recent changes to the testing regime. These remain some of the highest rates we have seen since the pandemic began.

From an education perspective, in the last week of January, there were approximately 3,500 cases in schools across the County, with 15% of pupils and 10% of staff absent for covid or other reasons. Some pupils are being moved to online learning where staff availability cannot be maintained. Secondary school pupils are being encouraged to wear face masks in communal areas and on home-school transport.

#### Budget highlights

The Council's budget is due to be debated on the 8<sup>th</sup> February, and the papers have recently been published. The key challenge we are facing is to stabilise finances over the short and medium term, so that services and support can be sustainably funded and not face sudden withdrawal in the future.

The Joint Administration has therefore proposed to increase 'Basic Council Tax' by 2%, in addition to a 3% 'Adult Social Care' precept increase, for a total 5% increase, or approximately £1/week increase for Band B & C households. In conjunction with an improved grant settlement from the UK government, this results in a balanced budget for 22/23; and a budget gap of £17m for 23/24, which will be the focus of budgeting work over the next twelve months.

I know that many residents will be concerned about the cost-of-living crisis, and the impact of a rise in Council Tax on top of the large increases in the cost of energy, national insurance, and other bills. The Administration is therefore also proposing to extend the Household Support Fund until at least March 2023, which will provide financial support to people in receipt of Universal Credit, and

provide 'free school meal' vouchers for eligible families throughout the school holidays.

I am helping residents on a regular basis to access the support that is available, so please share my contact details with anyone who needs them.

The Administration is also creating a £14m 'Just Transition Fund', to be spent over the next five years on projects to tackle inequality, improve lives and care for the environment. Some of the projects planned for the coming year are improvements in flood prevention, new investment in Independent Living services, and supporting care services in local communities. I anticipate that parish councils will be able to apply for funding in the future for smaller schemes that meet the aims of the fund, and will share details when this is ready.

Finally, the Administration is proposing that young people leaving the care system will receive full council tax relief until the age of 21, with discretionary targeted support available until 25, so as to give them the best chance while starting their independent adult lives, and to help them manage their financial situation. We know that many parents continue to support their children beyond 18, and so it seems only right that the Council should do the same for children leaving its care.

## Active travel proposals

The Active travel proposals in our area have been subject to much debate and discussion, and have now been refined. The current situation is:

- Madingley village scheme: has been changed in response to resident concerns: inverted (traffic now prohibited in EB direction), with changes to the Madingley Road/Cambridge Road junction instead of all down Cambridge Road.
- Dry Drayton village scheme: in response to resident concerns, this has been scrapped.
- M11 Bridge, Barton: will now be carried out by the Greater Cambridge Partnership, I expect alongside the Barton Greenway, but I should know more soon.
- St Neots Road, Hardwick: will now be carried out the GCP, as a forerunner to the C2C busway taking an on-road route along this section of road.

I expect that consultations on the final schemes will take place later this year. Thank you very much to everyone who participated in the consultation last year, or who contacted me directly, and as you can see, your feedback has been listened to!

## Traffic order: St Neots Road, Hardwick

As part of ongoing improvements to road safety, the Council is proposing to reduce the speed limit on St Neots Road (between the Madingley Road/A428 roundabout and Hardwick Village) from 60mph to 50mph. There are more details at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/traffic-regulation-orders/permanent-traffic-regulation-orders> and any comments should be sent to [policyandregulation@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:policyandregulation@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) using reference PR0781, or to me to pass on.

## 400 homes to benefit from improved energy efficiency

'Action on Energy Cambridgeshire', a collaboration between all the councils of Cambridgeshire, has received £6.5m in government funding to tackle high energy bills for households on low income. By investing in insulation, heat pumps and solar panels, residents will see reductions in their bills, as well as a positive environmental impact. To be considered, residents should contact South Cambridgeshire District Council.

## Additional needs employment event

The Council is running a virtual seminar on 25<sup>th</sup> March for the benefit of local employers, to explore the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, and how small adjustments in the workplace can enable potential staff with learning disabilities or neurodiverse conditions to access opportunities. If you have considered hiring people with additional needs in the past, or might do so in the future, I would urge you to signup at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cambridgeshire-and-peterborough-additional-needs-employment-event-tickets-223221330007>

## Applications open for farm holdings on County estate

Applications are due to open for tenancy of seven holdings on the Council's estate. A total of 1,800 acres are available to potential tenants, who should be entrepreneurs looking to start a rural business, either as new or existing farmers. For more details on the available holdings, please visit: [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/rural-business-opportunities](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/rural-business-opportunities).

## Contact Details

Councillors and residents are welcome to contact me on any issue which is concerning them:

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