

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Report to Barton Parish Council May 2021

Covid Update

At the end of April we saw a rise in rates of Covid-19 across South Cambridgeshire. For the week ending 17th April, there were 18 Covid-19 cases per 100,000 population, which is a 11% increase on the previous week. However, the district continues to have rates that are below both the regional and national average.

Across Cambridgeshire as a whole, the Covid-19 case rate for the week ending 17th April is 29 cases per 100,000 which is a rise of 20% on the previous week and is above both the average for the region and for England.

One person has died within 28 days of a positive Covid-19 test in Cambridgeshire since 30 March, which is a significant reduction on numbers of deaths earlier in the year. Nearly 85,000 people have had their first dose of vaccination in South Cambridgeshire by 25th April, of just over 141,000 people over the age of 16. Nearly 37,000 have had their second dose.

Cambourne to Cambridge Independent Audit

The Statement of Assumption and Constraints was published and representations have been submitted on the robustness and continuing appropriateness of the 51 individual assumptions and constraints identified. We now wait for the report from the auditor – expected toward the end of the month / early June.

5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS)

Good news that, as from 1st April 2021, South Cambs and City jointly have 6.1 years of housing land supply for the period 2021-2026. This figure will now not change again until April 2022 unless there is a planning appeal or a challenge where a planning inspector rules otherwise. Maintaining the 5YHLS vital in fending off speculative developments and applying local plan policies on affordable housing.

A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet

News last month that Skanska have been awarded a £507 million contract to deliver the improvement scheme and that the Development Consent Order (DCO) application by Highways England (HE) has been formally accepted by the Planning Inspectorate for examination. While this is undoubtedly an important scheme, HE's own analysis forecasts large increases in vehicle movements along the A428 and the A1303 which will inevitably cause further difficulties at Junction 13 and the Girton Interchange. Doing anything about that is sadly beyond the scope of this project, but we hope it focusses minds at HE when they do look at all ways solutions for Girton Interchange again.

Combined Authority Affordable Housing funding

Bad news last month as the Minister for Regional and Local Growth, Luke Hall MP, wrote to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority regarding the remaining ~£45 million funding for affordable housing, which will now not be forthcoming. The ministry had been reviewing progress on the £100m Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Affordable Housing Programme and have unfortunately concluded that the programme has made insufficient delivery progress and that the value for money being achieved is below expectations.

Virtual meetings

Along with many other local authorities and parish councils, South Cambs District Council leader wrote to Jacob Rees-Mogg MP urging him to extend the option of virtual council meetings post 6th May. There was also a legal challenge taken by the Association of Democratic Services Officers and Hertfordshire County Council (and also supported by government ministers!) but this has also now failed.

This means that there is a period between 7th May and 21st June after the virtual meeting legislation expires and before the final restrictions are planned to be lifted. The council has worked on a plan to limit the number of meetings held in person, but it is far from ideal.

We are also aware that some parish councils are in a difficult position due to the requirement to hold a meeting a certain number of days after the election, which falls after the virtual meeting deadline has passed but before their community hall can be used for public events!

Changes to permitted development rights

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick announced at the end of March a package of measures including:

- New planning law enabling unused commercial buildings to be changed into homes.
- New planning rules allowing for the speedy extension of public buildings.

For the first of these, homes can be delivered through the simpler ‘prior approval’ process instead of a full planning application. The legislation aims to bring this right forward from 1st August and there will be a requirement that the building has been vacant for 3 months.

The second change will allow for the extension, erection or alteration of school, college, university, hospital, and prison buildings by up to 25% of the existing footprint of the buildings on the site (or 250m², whichever is larger). The height restriction is also being increased from 5m to 6m.

East West Rail (EWR)

EWR has now launched its latest route consultation: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation>

We now have much more clarity about EWR’s intentions, and a big job trying to understand all of the impacts: on the environment, on the landscape, on noise pollution, on connections between villages, and generally on the quality of life in South Cambridgeshire.

We’re very disappointed that there has never been an opportunity for the public to be consulted on alternative approaches to Cambridge from Cambourne. A more extensive comparison between an approach into Cambridge North and EWR's preferred route has been published with this consultation to justify that decision, and will come under close scrutiny by residents. We will continue to raise questions on their behalf. We also understand that campaign group Cambridge Approaches are taking legal advice on a judicial review of the consultation to challenge the failure to fully develop and include a northern approach as an option. We think this is the right next step for the campaign to challenge what is ultimately a government decision.

There will be some very big impacts on nearby villages, especially Haslingfield and Harston, which face the prospect of a deep cutting and large flyover adjacent to them. We’re urging all residents to respond to the consultation with the detailed issues with the preferred route (alongside any criticism of EWR’s analysis of the northern route).

The consultation closes on 9th June.

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