

South Cambridgeshire District Councillors' Report to Parish Councils June 2017

Good news this month from the **Greater Cambridge City Deal** [GCCD] with the announcement of the locations of the first two Greenways: Waterbeach and Fulbourn. I attended a workshop, independently run on behalf of the GCCD to look at the 8 options for a new Park & Ride site. It was well attended by a mix of residents, councillors, County Council transport officers and their equivalent from Addenbrookes as well as Andy Campbell and one of his colleagues from Stagecoach. The over-long introduction provoked some sceptical views on the purpose of the workshop but, once everyone settled down to work in their groups, the atmosphere was positive. Although the purpose was not to identify a preferred option at this stage, it did appear that there was a good deal of consensus about the merits or otherwise of the various options. Consultation and further work will reduce the 8 options to 2 or 3 and in September the Board will make a final decision on the location.

Also this month the Board announced a refreshed vision for how the GCCD will accelerate the building of thousands of new homes and jobs and create a fit for the future transport network. There will be a change of name from GCCD to the Greater Cambridge Partnership with the strap line 'Growing & Sharing Prosperity' to reflect a strong collaboration and partnership approach.

The **Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority's** first meeting under its new chairman started with James Palmer signing the declaration of acceptance of office as Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The constituent councils have appointed their members on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Audit & Governance Committee, both of which are politically proportional. Additionally, the chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee must not belong to the same political party as that of the Mayor and there must be at least one independent person [not a councillor] of the Audit & Governance Committee. Indeed, the Combined Authority Board has appointed the independent person to be that committee's chairman. Portfolios for the Combined Authority have now been confirmed. The Leader of SCambs District Council holds the New Homes & Communities portfolio. Agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2szyvUI>

The agenda for the **Finance & Staffing Portfolio** holder's meeting included further applications for Community Chest funding [no local applications on this occasion but please get a move on with any new applications as the money won't last forever]. The PfH also received a report on the Council's 4 year Strategy for Apprenticeships. The Government's new apprenticeship scheme commenced in April 2017. This requires all organisations operating in the UK with more than 250 employees and with a salary bill of over £3m a year to make an investment in apprenticeships by way of a levy of 0.5% of their salary bill. It appears that employers who pay the levy and are committed to apprenticeship training will be able to get out more than they pay in to the levy through a 'top up' scheme. Currently it is unclear how this will work although it is anticipated that employers will be able to bid for additional funding. Targets are set [2.3% of headcount] for the number of apprenticeship starts local authorities have to achieve and performance will be reported to the Secretary of State. Based on SCambs' headcount of 426 its minimum target will be 11 apprenticeship starts each year for the next 3 years.

Agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2usQhWN>

The latest government statistics on council tax collection have recently been released. SCambs maintained its previous year's performance and came joint 3rd nationally collecting 99.4% of all council tax. Overall £104m in council tax was due to be collected by the Council on behalf of itself, Cambridgeshire County Council, the Police & Crime Commissioner's Officer, the Fire Authority and parish councils. The Council achieved joint sixth place for business rate collection with a 99.5% collection rate [improved from 99.4% previously]. SCambs has consistently performed well in this respect and we endorse Simon's public recognition of officers' hard work.

This month saw the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower which immediately prompted me, as **Housing Portfolio** holder to discuss with officers the fabric of all the Council's properties. As you will know SCambs does not have any tower blocks. Although we have used cladding as insulation on some of our properties [about 500 to date] none has the type of rain screen cladding used on Grenfell Tower. All insulation systems used on SCambs' properties are compliant with British Standards and Building Regulations and have the best rating for fire resistance. They have been certified by the British Board of Agreement [BBA] and have been fitted by PAS2030 [government accreditation standard] installers. Only houses and bungalows have had cladding installed both of which types of accommodation have front and back access points affording much better emergency evacuation options than was the case at Grenfell Tower. The Council had already commenced planned fire risk assessments of all its flatted blocks and communal facilities on 06 June 2017. These are due to be completed by 20 July at which time the findings of the assessments will be reviewed and appropriate action taken where necessary.

There was no **Planning** committee meeting in June. Members received advice on the recent Supreme Court Judgement relating to relevant policies for the supply of housing. Given that the effect of the ruling is that Policies ST/4 [Rural Centres], ST/5 [Minor Rural Centres], ST/6 [Group Villages, ST/7 [Infill Villages], DP1 [Sustainable Development] (a) and DP7 [Development Frameworks] are no longer to be considered as "out of date" by reason of para.49 of the NPPF it follows that any conflict with those adopted policies *could* be considered, in principle, to have an "adverse impact" for the purposes of para.14 . However, In the case of a refusal the Council would need to be able to establish **very clear reasons why** it is said those impacts "significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits" of the proposals, when considered in the context of the Framework. Thus, unless a Planning Inspector can be persuaded at appeal as to those reasons and the strength of force of those reasons, the view is that the Council will continue to lose cases at appeal notwithstanding the recent decision in the Supreme Court. For villages like Cottenham, Swavesey and Linton who have been particularly targeted by promoters seeking to prosper from the lack of a 5 year land supply situation, this does not provide a great deal of comfort. It is essential that work continues to provide a more reliable means of protection for our villages. It is disappointing that Gavin Barwell, the previous Minister of State for Housing & Planning lost his Croydon seat in the general election. He was absolutely on top of his brief, held in very high respect by civil servants and regarded as the best holder of the post for many years. Representing a London constituency made him acutely conscious of the urgency to get houses built. His successor, Alok Sharma becomes the 6th Housing Minister since 2010 and I have already asked for a meeting to pursue the discussion started with his predecessor about the unique challenges our district faces. Meanwhile the examination in public of SCambs' Local Plan is nearing completion and details of any modifications that are required will begin to give some indication of the weight that can be given to emerging policies.

Tim has highlighted news of a project called 'New Life on the Old West' to create a more resilient fenland by enhancing natural heritage connectivity across its largely arable landscape, piloting new ways of working on the ditch network and reconnecting people with their green assets. One aim is to reverse the decline in habitats and wildlife that has accompanied intensive agriculture. The parishes covered are Over, Willingham, Rampton, Cottenham, Haddenham, Wilburton, Thetford, Streatham and Wicken. The project will be led by Cambridgeshire ACRE and the intention is make a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a £600,000 grant.

As always your comments and questions on the foregoing or any other strategic or local issue are welcomed by your 3 district councillors.

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